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THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

BY GRANVILLE BARKER

THE MADRAS HOUSE
ANATOL
THE MARRYING OF ANN LEETE
THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE
WASTE
SOULS ON FIFTH

In Collaboration with Laurence Housman

PRUNELLA

THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE: A PLAY, IN FIVE ACTS

BY GRANVILLE BARKER

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1917

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The Voysey Inheritance

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THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

The office of Voysey and Son is in the best part of Lincoln's Inn. Its panelled rooms give out a sense of grandmotherly comfort and security, very grateful at first to the hesitating investor, the dubious litigant. Mr. Voysey's own room, into which he walks about twenty past ten of a morning, radiates enterprise besides. There is polish on everything; on the windows, on the mahogany of the tidily packed writing table that stands between them, on the brasswork of the fire-place in the other wall, on the glass of the fire-screen which preserves only the pleasantness of a sparkling fire, even on Mr. Voysey's hat as he takes it off to place it on the little red curtained shelf behind the door. Mr. Voysey is sixty or more, and masterful; would obviously be master anywhere from his own home outwards, or wreck the situation in his attempt. Indeed there is a buccaneering air sometimes in the twist of his glance, not altogether suitable to a family solicitor. On this bright October morning, Peacey, the head clerk, follows just too late to help him off with his coat, but in time to take it and hang it up with a quite unnecessary subservience. Mr. Voysey is evidently not capable enough to like capable men about him. Peacey, not quite removed from Nature, has made some attempts to acquire protective colouring. A very drunken client

might mistake him for his master. His voice very easily became a toneless echo of Mr. Voysey's; later his features caught a line or two from that mirror of all the necessary virtues into which he was so constantly gazing; but how his clothes, even when new, contrive to look like old ones of Mr. Voysey's is a mystery, and to his tailor a most annoying one. And Peacey is just a respectful number of years his master's junior. Relieved of his coat, Mr. Voysey carries to his table the bunch of beautiful roses he is accustomed to bring to the office three times a week, and places them for a moment only near the bowl of water there ready to receive them, while he takes up his letters. These lie ready, too, opened mostly, one or two private ones left closed and discreetly separate. By this time the usual salutations have passed, Peacey's "Good morning, sir," Mr. Voysey's "Morning, Peacey." Then as he gets to his letters Mr. Voysey starts his day's work.

MR. VOYSEY. Any news for me?

PEACEY. I hear bad accounts of Alguazils preferred, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. Oh . . from whom?

PEACEY. Merrit and James's head clerk in the train this morning.

MR. VOYSEY. They looked all right on . . Give me the Times. [PEACEY *goes to the fire-place for the Times; it is warming there.* MR. VOYSEY *waves a letter, then places it on the table.*] Here, that's for you . . Gerrard Cross business. Anything else?

PEACEY. [*As he turns the Times to its Finance page.*] I've made the usual notes.

MR. VOYSEY. Thank'ee.

PEACEY. Young Benham isn't back yet.

MR. VOYSEY. Mr. Edward must do as he thinks fit about that. Alguazils, Alg—oh, yes.

He is running his eye down the columns. PEACEY *leans over the letters.*

PEACEY. This is from Jackson, sir. Shall I take it?

MR. VOYSEY. From Jackson . . Yes. Alguazils. Mr. Edward's here, I suppose?

PEACEY. No, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. [*His eye twisting with some sharpness.*] What!

PEACEY. [*Almost alarmed.*] I beg pardon, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. Mr. Edward.

PEACEY. Oh, yes, sir, been in his room some time. I thought you said Headley; he's not due back till Thursday.

MR. VOYSEY *discards the Times and sits to his desk and his letters.*

MR. VOYSEY. Tell Mr. Edward I've come.

PEACEY. Yes, sir. Anything else?

MR. VOYSEY. Not for the moment. Cold morning, isn't it?

PEACEY. Quite surprising, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. We had a touch of frost down at Chislehurst.

PEACEY. So early!

MR. VOYSEY. I want it for the celery. All right, I'll call through about the rest of the letters.

PEACEY *goes, having secured a letter or two, and* MR. VOYSEY, *having sorted the rest* (a *proportion into the waste paper basket*) *takes up the forgotten roses and starts setting them into a bowl, with an artistic hand. Then his son* EDWARD *comes in.* MR. VOYSEY *gives him one glance and goes on arranging the roses, but says cheerily . .*

MR. VOYSEY. Good morning, my dear boy.

EDWARD *has little of his father in him, and that little is undermost. It is a refined face, but self-consciousness takes the place in it of imagination and in sup-*

pressing traits of brutality in his character it looks as if the young man had suppressed his sense of humour, too. But whether or no, that would not be much in evidence now, for EDWARD *is obviously going through some experience which is scaring him (there is no better word). He looks not to have slept for a night or two, and his standing there, clutching and unclutching the bundle of papers he carries, his eyes on his father, half appealingly, but half accusingly, too, his whole being altogether so unstrung and desperate, makes* MR. VOYSEY'S *uninterrupted arranging of the flowers seem very calculated indeed. At last the little tension of silence is broken.*

EDWARD. Father . .

MR. VOYSEY. Well?

EDWARD. I'm glad to see you.

This is a statement of fact. He doesn't know that the commonplace phrase sounds ridiculous at such a moment.

MR. VOYSEY. I see you've the papers there.

EDWARD. Yes.

MR. VOYSEY. You've been through them?

EDWARD. As you wished me . .

MR. VOYSEY. Well? [EDWARD *doesn't answer. Reference to the papers seems to overwhelm him with shame.* MR. VOYSEY *goes on with cheerful impatience.*] Come, come, my dear boy, you mustn't take it like this. You're puzzled and worried, of course. But why didn't you come down to me on Saturday night? I expected you . . I told you to come. Then your mother was wondering, of course, why you weren't with us for dinner yesterday.

EDWARD. I went through all the papers twice. I wanted to make quite sure.

MR. VOYSEY. Sure of what? I told you to come to me.

EDWARD. [*He is very near crying.*] Oh, father!

MR. VOYSEY. Now look here, Edward, I'm going to ring, and dispose of these letters. Please pull yourself together. [*He pushes the little button on his table.*]

EDWARD. I didn't leave my rooms all day yesterday.

MR. VOYSEY. A pleasant Sunday! You must learn, whatever the business may be, to leave it behind you at the Office. Why, life's not worth living else.

PEACEY *comes in to find* MR. VOYSEY *before the fire, ostentatiously warming and rubbing his hands.*

Oh, there isn't much else, Peacey. Tell Simmons that if he satisfies you about the details of this lease it'll be all right. Make a note for me of Mr. Grainger's address at Mentone. I shall have several letters to dictate to Atkinson. I'll whistle for him.

PEACEY. Mr. Burnett .. Burnett v. Marks had just come in, Mr. Edward.

EDWARD. [*Without turning.*] It's only fresh instructions. Will you take them?

PEACEY. All right.

PEACEY *goes, lifting his eyebrow at the queerness of* EDWARD'S *manner. This* MR. VOYSEY *sees, returning to his table with a little scowl.*

MR. VOYSEY. Now sit down. I've given you a bad forty-eight hours, it seems. Well, I've been anxious about you. Never mind, we'll thresh the thing out now. Go through the two accounts. Mrs. Murberry's first . . how do you find it stands?

EDWARD. [*His feelings choking him.*] I hoped you were playing some trick on me.

MR. VOYSEY. Come, now.

EDWARD *separates the papers precisely and starts to detail them; his voice quite toneless. Now and then his father's sharp comments ring out in contrast.*

EDWARD. We've got the lease of her present house, several agreements . . and here's her will. Here's also a

sometime expired power of attorney over her securities and her property generally . . it was for six months.

MR. VOYSEY. She was in South Africa.

EDWARD. Here's the Sheffield mortgage and the Henry Smith mortgage with Banker's receipts . . hers to us for the interest up to date . . four and a half and five per cent. Then . . Fretworthy Bonds. There's a memorandum in your writing that they are at the Bank; but you didn't say what Bank.

MR. VOYSEY. My own . . Stukeley's.

EDWARD. [*Just dwelling on the words.*] Your own. I marked that with a query. There's eight thousand five hundred in three and a half India stock. And there are her Banker's receipts for cheques on account of those dividends. I presume for those dividends.

MR. VOYSEY. Why not?

EDWARD. [*Gravely.*] Because then, Father, there are Banker's half yearly receipts for sums amounting to an average of four hundred and twenty pounds a year. But I find no record of any capital to produce this.

MR. VOYSEY. Go on. What do you find?

EDWARD. Till about three years back there seems to have been eleven thousand in Queenslands which would produce—did produce exactly the same sum. But after January of that year I find no record of this.

MR. VOYSEY. In fact, the Queenslands are missing?

EDWARD. [*Hardly uttering the word.*] Yes.

MR. VOYSEY. From which you conclude?

EDWARD. I concluded at first that you had not handed me all the papers connected with——

MR. VOYSEY. Since Mrs. Murberry evidently gets another four twenty a year somehow; lucky woman.

EDWARD. [*In agony.*] Oh!

MR. VOYSEY. Well, we'll return to the good lady later. Now let's take the other.

EDWARD. The Hatherley Trust.

MR. VOYSEY. Quite so.

EDWARD. [*With one accusing glance.*] Trust.

MR. VOYSEY. Go on.

EDWARD. Oh, father . .

His grief comes uppermost again, and MR. VOYSEY *meets it kindly.*

MR. VOYSEY. I know, my dear boy. I shall have lots to say to you. But let's get quietly through with these details first.

EDWARD. [*Bitterly now.*] Oh, this is simple enough. We're young Hatherley's only trustees till his coming of age in about five years' time. The property was eighteen thousand invested in Consols. Certain sums were to be allowed for his education; these have been and are still being paid. There is no record as to the rest of the capital.

MR. VOYSEY. None?

EDWARD. Yes . . I beg your pardon, sir. There's a memorandum to refer to the Bletchley Land Scheme.

MR. VOYSEY. That must be ten years ago. But he's credited with the interest on his capital?

EDWARD. On paper, sir. The balance was to be reinvested. There's a partial account in your hand writing. He's credited with the Consol interest.

MR. VOYSEY. Quite so.

EDWARD. I think I've heard you say that the Bletchley scheme paid seven and a half.

MR. VOYSEY. At one time. Have you taken the trouble to calculate what will be due from us to the lad?

EDWARD. Capital and compound interest . . . about twenty-six thousand pounds.

MR. VOYSEY. Yes, it's a large sum. In five years' time?

EDWARD. When he comes of age.

MR. VOYSEY. Well, that gives us, say four years and six months in which to think about it.

EDWARD *waits, hopelessly, for his father to speak again; then says . .*

EDWARD. Thank you for showing me these, sir. Shall I put them back in your safe now?

MR. VOYSEY. Yes, you'd better. There's the key. [EDWARD *reaches for the bunch, his face hidden.*] Put them down. Your hand shakes . . why, you might have been drinking . . I'll put them away later. It's no use having hysterics, Edward. Look the trouble in the face.

EDWARD'S *only answer is to go to the fire, as far from his father as the room allows. And there he leans on the mantelpiece, his shoulders heaving.*

MR. VOYSEY. I'm sorry, my dear boy. I wouldn't tell you if I could help it.

EDWARD. I can't believe it. And that you should be telling it me.

MR. VOYSEY. Let your feelings go, and get that part of the business over. It isn't pleasant, I know. It isn't pleasant to inflict it on you.

EDWARD. How I got through that outer office this morning, I don't know. I came early, but some of them were here. Peacey came into my room; he must have seen there was something up.

MR. VOYSEY. That's no matter.

EDWARD. [*Able to turn to his father again; won round by the kind voice.*] How long has it been going on? Why didn't you tell me before? Oh, I know you thought you'd pull through; but I'm your partner . . I'm responsible, too. Oh, I don't want to shirk that . . don't think I mean to shirk that, father. Perhaps I ought to have discovered, but those affairs were always in your hands. I trusted . . I beg your pardon. Oh, it's us . . not you. Everyone has trusted us.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Calmly and kindly still.*] You don't seem to notice that I'm not breaking my heart like this.

EDWARD. What's the extent of the mischief? When did it begin? Father, what made you begin it?

MR. VOYSEY. I didn't begin it.

EDWARD. You didn't. Who, then?

MR. VOYSEY. My father before me. [EDWARD *stares.*] That calms you a little.

EDWARD. I'm glad . . my dear father! [*And he puts out his hand. Then just a doubt enters his mind.*] But I . . it's amazing.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Shaking his head.*] My inheritance, Edward.

EDWARD. My dear father!

MR. VOYSEY. I had hoped it wasn't to be yours.

EDWARD. D'you mean to tell me that this sort of thing has been going on for years? For more than thirty years!

MR. VOYSEY. Yes.

EDWARD. That's a little difficult to understand just at first, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Sententiously.*] We do what we must in this world, Edward. I have done what I had to do.

EDWARD. [*His emotion well cooled by now.*] Perhaps I'd better just listen quietly while you explain.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Concentrating.*] You know that I'm heavily into Northern Electrics.

EDWARD. Yes.

MR. VOYSEY. But you don't know how heavily. When I discovered the Municipalities were organising the purchase, I thought, of course, the stock'd be up a hundred and forty—a hundred and fifty in no time. Now Leeds won't make up her quarrel with the other place . . there'll be no bill brought in for ten years. I bought at ninety-five. What are they now?

EDWARD. Eighty-eight.

MR. VOYSEY. Eighty-seven and a half. In ten years I may be . . ! That's why you've had to be told.

EDWARD. With whose money are you so heavily into Northern Electrics?

MR. VOYSEY. The firm's money.

EDWARD. Clients' money?

MR. VOYSEY. Yes.

EDWARD. [*Coldly.*] Well . . I'm waiting for your explanation, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. You seem to have recovered yourself pretty much.

EDWARD. No, sir. I'm trying to understand, that's all.

MR. VOYSEY. [*With a shrug.*] Children always think the worst of their parents. I did of mine. It's a pity.

EDWARD. Go on, sir, go on. Let me know the worst.

MR. VOYSEY. There's no immediate danger. I should think anyone could see that from the state of these accounts. There's no actual danger at all.

EDWARD. Is that the worst?

MR. VOYSEY. [*His anger rising.*] Have you studied these two accounts, or have you not?

EDWARD. Yes, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. Well, where's the deficiency in Mrs. Murberry's income . . has she ever gone without a shilling? What has young Hatherley lost?

EDWARD. He stands to lose——

MR. VOYSEY. He stands to lose nothing if I'm spared for a little, and you will only bring a little common sense to bear, and try to understand the difficulties of my position.

EDWARD. Father, I'm not thinking ill of you . . that is, I'm trying not to. But won't you explain how you're justified—?

MR. VOYSEY. In putting our affairs in order.

EDWARD. Are you doing that?

MR. VOYSEY. What else?

EDWARD. [*Starting patiently to examine the matter.*] How bad were things when you first came to control them?

MR. VOYSEY. Oh, I forget.

EDWARD. You can't forget.

MR. VOYSEY. Well . . pretty bad.

EDWARD. Do you know how it was my grandfather began to——

MR. VOYSEY. Muddlement, muddlement! Then the money went, and what was he to do? He'd no capital, no credit, and was in terror of his life. My dear Edward, if I hadn't found it out he'd have confessed to the first man who came and asked for a balance sheet.

EDWARD. Well, what exact sum was he to the bad then?

MR. VOYSEY. I forget. Several thousands.

EDWARD. But surely it has not taken all these years to pay off——

MR. VOYSEY. Oh, hasn't it!

EDWARD. [*Making his point.*] But how does it happen, sir, that such a comparatively recent trust as young Hatherley's has been broken into?

MR. VOYSEY. Well, what could be safer than to use that money? There's a Consol investment, and not a sight wanted of either capital or interest for five years.

EDWARD. [*Utterly beaten.*] Father, are you mad?

MR. VOYSEY. Certainly not. My practice is to reinvest my clients' money when it is entirely under my control. The difference between the income this money has to bring to them and the income it is actually bringing to me I utilise in my endeavour to fill up the deficit in the firm's accounts . . in fact, to try and put things straight. Doesn't it follow that the more low interest bearing capital I can use, the better . . the less risky things I have to put it into. Most of young Hatherley's Consol capital is out on mortgage at four and a half and five . . safe as safe can be.

EDWARD. But he should have the benefit.

MR. VOYSEY. He has the amount of his consol interest.

EDWARD. Are the mortgages in his name?

MR. VOYSEY. Some of them . . some of them. That's a technical matter. With regard to Mrs. Murberry . . those Fretworthy Bonds at my bank . . I've raised five thousand on them. I can release her Bonds to-morrow if she wants them.

EDWARD. Where's the five thousand.

MR. VOYSEY. I don't know . . It was paid into my private account. Yes, I do remember. Some of it went to complete a purchase . . that and two thousand more out of the Skipworth fund.

EDWARD. But, my dear father——

MR. VOYSEY. Well?

EDWARD. [*Summing it all up very simply.*] It's not right.

MR. VOYSEY *considers his son for a moment with a pitying shake of the head.*

MR. VOYSEY. Oh . . why is it so hard for a man to see clearly beyond the letter of the law! Will you consider a moment, Edward, the position in which I found myself? Was I to see my father ruined and disgraced without lifting a finger to help him? . . not to mention the interest of the clients. I paid back to the man who would have lost most by my father's mistakes every penny of his money. He never knew the danger he'd been in . . never passed an uneasy moment about it. It was I who lay awake. I have now somewhere a letter from that man to my father thanking him effusively for the way in which he'd conducted some matter. It comforted my poor father. Well, Edward, I stepped outside the letter of the law to do that. Was that right or wrong?

EDWARD. In its result, sir, right.

MR. VOYSEY. Judge me by the result. I took the risk of failure . . I should have suffered. I could have kept clear of the danger if I'd liked.

EDWARD. But that's all past. The thing that concerns me is what you are doing now.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Gently reproachful now.*] My boy, you must trust me a little. It's all very well for you to come in at the end of the day and criticise. But I, who have done the day's work, know how that work had to be done. And here's our firm, prosperous, respected, and without a stain on its honour. That's the main point, isn't it? And I think that achievement should earn me the right to be trusted a little . . shouldn't it?

EDWARD. [*Quite irresponsive to this pathetic appeal.*] Look here, sir, I'm dismissing from my mind all prejudice about speaking the truth . . acting upon one's instructions, behaving as any honest firm of solicitors must behave . .

MR. VOYSEY. You need not. I tell no unnecessary lies. If a man of any business ability gives me definite instructions about his property, I follow them.

EDWARD. Father, no unnecessary lies!

MR. VOYSEY. Well, my friend, go and tell Mrs. Murberry that four hundred and twenty pounds of her income hasn't for the last eight years come from the place she thinks it's come from, and see how happy you'll make her.

EDWARD. But is that four hundred and twenty a year as safe to come to her as it was before you meddled with the capital?

MR. VOYSEY. I see no reason why——

EDWARD. What's the security?

MR. VOYSEY. [*Putting his coping stone on the argument.*] My financial ability.

EDWARD. [*Really not knowing whether to laugh or cry.*] Why, it seems as if you were satisfied with this state of things.

MR. VOYSEY. Edward, you really are most unsympathetic and unreasonable. I give all I have to the firm's work . . my brain . . my energies . . my whole life. I can't turn

my abilities into hard cash at par . . I wish I could. Do you suppose that if I could establish every one of these people with a separate and consistent bank balance to-morrow that I shouldn't do it? Do you suppose that it's a pleasure . . that it's relaxation to have these matters continually on one's mind? Do you suppose—?

EDWARD. [*Thankfully able to meet anger with anger.*] I find it impossible to believe that you couldn't somehow have put things to rights by now.

MR. VOYSEY. Oh, do you? Somehow!

EDWARD. In thirty years the whole system must either have come hopelessly to grief . . or during that time there must have been opportunities——

MR. VOYSEY. Well, if you're so sure, I hope that when I'm under ground you may find them.

EDWARD. I!

MR. VOYSEY. And put everything right with a stroke of the pen, if it's so easy!

EDWARD. I!

MR. VOYSEY. You're my partner and my son, and you'll inherit the business.

EDWARD. [*Realising at last that he has been led to the edge of this abyss.*] Oh, no, father.

MR. VOYSEY. Why else have I had to tell you all this?

EDWARD. [*Very simply.*] Father, I can't. I can't possibly. I don't think you've any right to ask me.

MR. VOYSEY. Why not, pray?

EDWARD. It's perpetuating the dishonesty.

MR. VOYSEY *hardens at the unpleasant word.*

MR. VOYSEY. You don't believe that I've told you the truth.

EDWARD. I wish to believe it.

MR. VOYSEY. It's no proof . . that I've earned these twenty or thirty people their incomes for the last—how many years?

EDWARD. Whether what you have done and are doing is wrong or right . . I can't meddle in it.

For the moment MR. VOYSEY *looks a little dangerous.*

MR. VOYSEY. Very well. Forget all I've said. Go back to your room. Get back to your own mean drudgery. My life's work—my splendid life's work—ruined! What does that matter?

EDWARD. Whatever did you expect of me?

MR. VOYSEY. [*Making a feint at his papers.*] Oh, nothing, nothing. [*Then he slams them down with great effect.*] Here's a great edifice built up by years of labour and devotion and self-sacrifice . . a great arch you may call it . . a bridge which is to carry our firm to safety with honour. [*This variation of Disraeli passes unnoticed.*] My work! And now, as I near the end of my life, it still lacks the key-stone. Perhaps I am to die with my work just incomplete. Then is there nothing that a son might do? Do you think I shouldn't be proud of you, Edward . . that I shouldn't bless you from—wherever I may be, when you completed my life's work . . with perhaps just one kindly thought of your father?

In spite of this oratory, the situation is gradually impressing EDWARD.

EDWARD. What will happen if I . . if I desert you?

MR. VOYSEY. I'll protect you as best I can.

EDWARD. I wasn't thinking of myself, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. [*With great nonchalance.*] Well, I shan't mind the exposure, you know. It won't make me blush in my coffin . . and you're not so foolish, I hope, as to be thinking of the feelings of your brothers and sisters. Considering how simple it would have been for me to go to my grave in peace and quiet, and let you discover the whole thing afterwards, the fact that I didn't, that I have taken some thought for the future of all of you might perhaps

have convinced you that I . . ! But there . . consult your own safety.

EDWARD *has begun to pace the room, indecision growing upon him.*

EDWARD. This is a queer thing to have to make up one's mind about, isn't it, father?

MR. VOYSEY. [*Watching him closely, and modulating his* voice.] My dear boy, I understand the shock to your feelings that this disclosure must have been.

EDWARD. Yes, I thought this morning that next week would see us in the dock together.

MR. VOYSEY. And I suppose if I'd broken down, and begged your pardon for my folly, you'd have done anything for me, gone to prison smiling, eh?

EDWARD. I suppose so.

MR. VOYSEY. Yes, it's easy enough to forgive. I'm sorry I can't go in sack cloth and ashes to oblige you. [*Now he begins to rally his son; easy in his strength.*] My dear Edward, you've lived a quiet, humdrum life up to now, with your books and your philosophy and your agnosticism and your ethics of this and your ethics of that . . dear me, these are the sort of garden oats which young men seem to sow now-a-days! . . and you've never before been brought face to face with any really vital question. Now don't make a fool of yourself just through inexperience. Try and give your mind freely and unprejudicedly to the consideration of this very serious matter. I'm not angry at what you've said to me. I'm quite willing to forget it. And it's for your own sake, and not for mine, Edward, that I do beg you to—to—to be a man, and try and take a practical common sense view of the position you find yourself in. It's not a pleasant position, I know, but it's unavoidable.

EDWARD. You should have told me before you took me into partnership. [*Oddly enough, it is this last flicker of*

rebellion which breaks down MR. VOYSEY'S *caution. Now he lets fly with a vengeance.*]

MR. VOYSEY. Should I be telling you at all if I could possibly help it? Don't I know that you're about as fit for this job as a babe unborn? Haven't I been worrying over that for these last three years? But I'm in a corner . . and I won't see all this work of mine come to smash simply because of your scruples. If you're a son of mine you'll do as I tell you. Hadn't I the same choice to make? . . and this is a safer game for you than it was for me then. D'you suppose I didn't have scruples? If you run away from this, Edward, you're a coward. My father was a coward, and he suffered for it to the end of his days. I was sick-nurse to him here more than partner. Good Lord! . . of course it's pleasant and comfortable to keep within the law . . then the law will look after you. Otherwise you have to look pretty sharp after yourself. You have to cultivate your own sense of right and wrong; deal your own justice. But that makes a bigger man of you, let me tell you. How easily . . how easily could I have walked out of my father's office and left him to his fate; no one would have blamed me! But I didn't. I thought it my better duty to stay and . . yes, I say it with all reverence . . to take up my cross. Well, I've carried that cross pretty successfully. And what's more, it's made a happy man of me . . a better, stronger man than skulking about in shame and in fear of his life ever made of my poor dear father. [*Relieved at having let out the truth, but doubtful of his wisdom in doing so, he changes his tone.*] I don't want what I've been saying to influence you, Edward. You are a free agent . . and you must decide upon your own course of action. Now don't let's discuss the matter any more for the moment.

EDWARD *looks at his father with clear eyes.*

EDWARD. Don't forget to put these papers away.

He restores them to their bundles and hands them back; it is his only comment. MR. VOYSEY *takes them and his meaning in silence.*

MR. VOYSEY. Are you coming down to Chislehurst soon? We've got Hugh and his wife, and Booth and Emily, and Christopher for two or three days, till he goes back to school.

EDWARD. How is Chris?

MR. VOYSEY. All right again now . . grows more like his father. Booth's very proud of him. So am I.

EDWARD. I think I can't face them all just at present.

MR. VOYSEY. Nonsense.

EDWARD. [*A little wave of emotion going through him.*] I feel as if this thing were written on my face. How I shall get through business I don't know!

MR. VOYSEY. You're weaker than I thought, Edward.

EDWARD. [*A little ironically.*] A disappointment to you, father?

MR. VOYSEY. No, no.

EDWARD. You should have brought one of the others into the firm . . Trenchard or Booth.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Hardening.*] Trenchard! [*He dismisses that.*] Well, you're a better man than Booth. Edward, you mustn't imagine that the whole world is standing on its head merely because you've had an unpleasant piece of news. You come down to Chislehurst to-night . . well, say to-morrow night. It'll be good for you . . stop your brooding . . that's your worst vice, Edward. You'll find the household as if nothing had happened. Then you'll remember that nothing really has happened. And presently you'll get to see that nothing need happen, if you keep your head. I remember times, when things have seemed at their worst, what a relief it's been to me . . my romp with you all in the nursery just before your bed time. Do you remember?

EDWARD. Yes. I cut your head open once with that gun.

MR. VOYSEY. [*In a full glow of fine feeling.*] And, my dear boy, if I knew that you were going to inform the next client you met of what I've just told you . .

EDWARD. [*With a shudder.*] Oh, father!

MR. VOYSEY. . . And that I should find myself in prison to-morrow, I wouldn't wish a single thing I've ever done undone. I have never wilfully harmed man or woman. My life's been a happy one. Your dear mother has been spared to me. You're most of you good children, and a credit to what I've done for you.

EDWARD. [*The deadly humour of this too much for him.*] Father!

MR. VOYSEY. Run along now, run along. I must finish my letters and get into the City.

He might be scolding a schoolboy for some trifling fault. EDWARD *turns to have a look at the keen, unembarrassed face.* MR. VOYSEY *smiles at him and proceeds to select from the bowl a rose for his buttonhole.*

EDWARD. I'll think it over, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. Of course you will. And don't brood, Edward, don't brood.

So EDWARD *leaves him; and having fixed the rose to his satisfaction, he rings his table telephone and calls through it to the listening clerk.*

Send Atkinson to me, please. [*Then he gets up, keys in hand, to lock away Mrs. Murberry's and the Hatherley trust papers.*]

THE SECOND ACT

The VOYSEY *dining-room at Chislehurst, when children and grandchildren are visiting, is dining-table and very little else. And at this moment in the evening, when five or six men are sprawling back in their chairs, and the air is clouded with smoke, it is a very typical specimen of the middle-class English domestic temple; the daily sacrifice consummated, the acolytes dismissed, the women safely in the drawing-room, and the chief priests of it taking their surfeited ease round the dessert-piled altar. It has the usual red-papered walls (like a reflection, they are, of the underdone beef so much consumed within them); the usual varnished woodwork, which is known as grained oak; there is the usual hot, mahogany furniture; and, commanding point of the whole room, there is the usual black-marble sarcophagus of a fireplace. Above this hangs one of the two or three oil paintings, which are all that break the red pattern of the walls, the portrait painted in 1880 of an undistinguished looking gentleman aged sixty; he is shown sitting in a more graceful attitude than it could ever have been comfortable for him to assume.* MR. VOYSEY'S *father it is, and the brass plate at the bottom of the frame tells us that the portrait was a presentation one. On the mantelpiece stands, of course, a clock; at either end a china vase filled with paper spills. And in front of the fire—since that is*

the post of vantage, stands at this moment MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. *He is the second son, of the age that it is necessary for a Major to be, and of an appearance that many ordinary Majors in ordinary regiments are. He went into the army because he thought it would be like a schoolboy's idea of it; and, being there, he does his little all to keep it so. He stands astride, hands in pockets, coat-tails through his arms, cigar in mouth, moustache bristling. On either side of him sits at the table an old gentleman; the one is* MR. EVAN COLPUS, *the vicar of their parish, the other* MR. GEORGE BOOTH, *a friend of long standing, and the Major's godfather.* MR. COLPUS *is a harmless enough anachronism, except for the waste of £400 a year in which his stipend involves the community. Leaving most of his parochial work to an energetic curate, he devotes his serious attention to the composition of two sermons a week. They deal with the difficulties of living the Christian life as experienced by people who have nothing else to do. Published in series from time to time, these form suitable presents for bedridden parishioners.* MR. GEORGE BOOTH, *on the contrary, is as gay an old gentleman as can be found in Chislehurst. An only son; his father left him at the age of twenty-five a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds (a plum, as he called it). At the same time he had the good sense to dispose of his father's business, into which he had been most unwillingly introduced five years earlier, for a like sum before he was able to depreciate its value. It was* MR. VOYSEY'S *invaluable assistance in this transaction which first bound the two together in great friendship. Since that time Mr. Booth has been bent on nothing but enjoying himself. He has even remained a bachelor*

with that object. Money has given him all he wants, therefore he loves and reverences money; while his imagination may be estimated by the fact that he has now reached the age of sixty-five still possessing more of it than he knows what to do with. At the head of the table, meditatively cracking walnuts, sits MR. VOYSEY. *He has his back there to the conservatory door—you know it is the conservatory door because there is a curtain to pull over it, and because half of it is frosted glass with a purple key pattern round the edge. On* MR. VOYSEY'S *left is* DENIS TREGONING, *a nice enough young man. And at the other end of the table sits* EDWARD, *not smoking, not talking, hardly listening, very depressed. Behind him is the ordinary door of the room, which leads out into the dismal, draughty hall. The Major's voice is like the sound of a cannon through the tobacco smoke.*

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Of course I'm hot and strong for conscription . .

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. My dear boy, the country'd never stand it. No Englishman——

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*Dropping the phrase heavily upon the poor old gentleman.*] I beg your pardon. If we . . the Army . . say to the country . . Upon our honour, conscription is necessary for your safety . . what answer has the country? What? [*He pauses defiantly.*] There you are . . none!

TREGONING. Booth will imagine because one doesn't argue that one has nothing to say. You ask the country.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Perhaps I will. Perhaps I'll chuck the Service and go into the House. [*Then falling into the sing song of a favourite phrase.*] I'm not a conceited man . . but I believe that if I speak out upon a subject I understand, and only upon that subject, the House

will l i s t e n . . and if others followed my example we should be a far more business-like and go-ahead community.

He pauses for breath, and MR. BOOTH *seizes the opportunity.*

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. If you think the gentlemen of England will allow themselves to be herded with a lot of low fellers and made to carry guns—!

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*Obliterating him once more.*] Just one moment. Have you thought of the physical improvement which conscription would bring about in the manhood of the country? What England wants is Chest! [*He generously inflates his own.*] Chest and Discipline. I don't care how it's obtained. Why, we suffer from a lack of it in our homes——

MR. VOYSEY. [*With the crack of a nut.*] Your godson talks a deal, don't he? You know, when Booth gets into a club he gets on the committee . . gets on any committee to enquire into anything . . and then goes on at 'em just like this. Don't you, Booth?

BOOTH *knuckles under easily enough to his father's sarcasm.*

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Well, sir, people tell me I'm a useful man on committees.

MR. VOYSEY. I don't doubt it . . your voice must drown all discussion.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. You can't say I don't listen to you, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. I don't . . and I'm not blaming you. But I must say I often think what a devil of a time the family will have with you when I'm gone. Fortunately for your poor mother, she's deaf.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. And wouldn't you wish me, sir, as eldest son . . . Trenchard not counting . . .

MR. VOYSEY. [*With the crack of another nut.*] Tren-

chard not counting. By all means, bully them. Get up your subjects a bit better, and then bully them. I don't manage things that way myself, but I think it's your best chance . . if there weren't other people present I'd say your only chance, Booth.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*With some discomfort.*] Ha! If I were a conceited man, sir, I could trust you to take it out of me.

MR. VOYSEY. [*As he taps* MR. BOOTH *with the nut crackers.*] Help yourself, George, and drink to your godson's health. Long may he keep his chest notes! Never heard him on parade, have you?

TREGONING. I notice military men must display themselves . . that's why Booth acts as a firescreen. I believe that after mess that position is positively rushed.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*Cheering to find an opponent he can tackle.*] If you want a bit of fire, say so, you sucking Lord Chancellor. Because I mean to allow you to be my brother-in-law you think you can be impertinent.

So TREGONING *moves to the fire, and that changes the conversation.*

MR. VOYSEY. By the bye, Vicar, you were at Lady Mary's yesterday. Is she giving us anything towards that window?

MR. COLPUS. Five pounds more; she has promised me five pounds.

MR. VOYSEY. Then how will the debt stand?

MR. COLPUS. Thirty-three . . no, thirty-two pounds.

MR. VOYSEY. We're a long time clearing it off.

MR. COLPUS. [*Gently querulous.*] Yes, now that the window is up, people don't seem so ready to contribute as they were.

TREGONING. We must mention that to Hugh!

MR. COLPUS. [*Tactful at once.*] Not that the work is not universally admired. I have heard Hugh's design praised by quite competent judges. But certainly I feel

now it might have been wiser to have delayed the unveiling until the money was forthcoming.

TREGONING. Never deliver goods to the Church on credit.

MR. COLPUS. Eh? [TREGONING *knows he is a little hard of hearing.*]

MR. VOYSEY. Well, as it was my wish that my son should do the design, I suppose in the end I shall have to send you a cheque.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Anonymously.

MR. COLPUS. Oh, that would be——

MR. VOYSEY. No, why should I? Here, George Booth, you shall halve it with me.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. I'm damned if I do.

MR. COLPUS. [*Proceeding, conveniently deaf.*] You remember that at the meeting we had of the parents and friends to decide on the positions of the names of the poor fellows and the regiments and coats of arms and so on . . when Hugh said so violently that he disapproved of the war and made all those remarks about land-lords and Bibles and said he thought of putting in a figure of Britannia blushing for shame or something . . I'm beginning to fear that may have created a bad impression.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Why should they mind . . what on earth does Hugh know about war? He couldn't tell a battery horse from a bandsman. I don't pretend to criticise art. I think the window'd be very pretty if it wasn't so broken up into bits.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Fortified by his "damned" and his last glass of port.*] These young men are so ready with their disapproval. Criticism starts in the cradle nowadays. When I was young, people weren't always questioning this and questioning that.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Lack of discipline.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Hurrying on.*] The way a man

now even stops to think what he's eating and drinking. And in religious matters . . Vicar, I put it to you . . there's no uniformity at all.

MR. COLPUS. Ah . . I try to keep myself free from the disturbing influences of modern thought.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Young men must be forming their own opinions about this and their opinions about that. You know, Edward, you're worse even than Hugh is.

EDWARD. [*Glancing up mildly at this sudden attack.*] What have I done, Mr. Booth?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Not the readiest of men.*] Well . . aren't you one of those young men who go about the world making difficulties?

EDWARD. What sort of difficulties?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Triumphantly.*] Just so . . I never can make out. Surely when you're young you can ask the advice of your elders and when you grow up you find Laws . . lots of laws divine and human laid down for our guidance. [*Well in possession of the conversation he spreads his little self.*] I look back over a fairly long life and . . perhaps I should say by Heaven's help . . I find nothing that I can honestly reproach myself with. And yet I don't think I ever took more than five minutes to come to a decision upon any important point. One's private life is, I think, one's own affair . . I should allow no one to pry into that. But as to worldly things . . well, I have come into several sums of money and my capital is still intact . . ask your father. [MR. VOYSEY *nods gravely.*] I've never robbed any man. I've never lied over anything that mattered. As a citizen I pay my taxes without grumbling very much. Yes, and I sent conscience money too upon one occasion. I consider that any man who takes the trouble can live the life of a gentleman. [*And he finds that his cigar is out.*]

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*Not to be outdone by this display of virtue.*] Well, I'm not a conceited man, but——

TREGONING. Are you sure, Booth?

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Shut up. I was going to say when my young cub of a brother-in-law-to-be interrupted me, that T r a i n i n g, for which we all have to be thankful to you, Sir, has much to do with it. [*Suddenly he pulls his trousers against his legs.*] I say, I'm scorching! D'you want another cigar, Denis?

TREGONING. No, thank you.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. I do.

And he glances round, but TREGONING *sees a box on the table and reaches it. The Vicar gets up.*

MR. COLPUS. M-m-m-must be taking my departure.

MR. VOYSEY. Already!

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*Frowning upon the cigar box.*] No, not those. Where are the Ramon Allones? What on earth has Honor done with them?

MR. VOYSEY. Spare time for a chat with Mrs. Voysey before you go. She has ideas about a children's tea fight.

MR. COLPUS. Certainly I will.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*Scowling helplessly around.*] My goodness! . . one can never find anything in this house.

MR. COLPUS. I won't say good-bye then.

He is sliding through the half opened door when ETHEL *meets him flinging it wide. She is the younger daughter, the baby of the family, but twenty-three now.*

MR. VOYSEY. I say, it's cold again to-night! An ass of an architect who built this place . . such a draught between these two doors.

He gets up to draw the curtain. When he turns COLPUS *has disappeared, while* ETHEL *has been followed into the room by* ALICE MAITLAND, *who shuts*

the door after her. MISS ALICE MAITLAND *is a young lady of any age to thirty. Nor need her appearance alter for the next fifteen years; since her nature is healthy and well-balanced. She possesses indeed the sort of athletic chastity which is a characteristic charm of Northern spinsterhood. It mayn't be a pretty face, but it has alertness and humour; and the resolute eyes and eyebrows are a more innocent edition of* MR. VOYSEY'S, *who is her uncle.* ETHEL *goes straight to her father* [*though her glance is on* DENIS *and his on her*] *and chirps, birdlike, in her spoiled-child way.*

ETHEL. We think you've stayed in here quite long enough.

MR. VOYSEY. That's to say, Ethel thinks Denis has been kept out of her pocket much too long.

ETHEL. Ethel wants billiards . . not proper billiards . . snooker or something. Oh, Papa, what a dessert you've eaten. Greedy pig!

ALICE *is standing behind* EDWARD, *considering his hair-parting apparently.*

ALICE. Crack me a filbert, please, Edward . . I had none.

EDWARD. [*Jumping up, rather formally, well-mannered.*] I beg your pardon, Alice. Won't you sit down?

ALICE. No.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Taking* ETHEL *on his knee.*] Come here, puss. Have you made up your mind yet what you want for a wedding present?

ETHEL. [*Rectifying a stray hair in his beard.*] After mature consideration, I decide on a cheque.

MR. VOYSEY. Do you!

ETHEL. Yes, I think that a cheque will give most scope to your generosity. Of course, if you desire to add any trimmings in the shape of a piano or a Turkey carpet you

may . . and Denis and I will be very grateful. But I think I'd let yourself go over a cheque.

MR. VOYSEY. You're a minx.

ETHEL. What is the use of having money if you don't spend it on me?

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*Giving up the cigar search.*] Here, who's going to play?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Pathetically as he gets up.*] Well, if my wrist will hold out . .

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*To* TREGONING.] No, don't you bother to look for them. [*He strides from the room, his voice echoing through the hall.*] Honor, where are those Ramon Allones?

ALICE. [*Calling after.*] She's in the drawing-room with Auntie and Mr. Colpus.

MR. VOYSEY. Now I should suggest that you and Denis go and take off the billiard table cover. You'll find folding it up is a very excellent amusement.

He illustrates his meaning with his table napkin and by putting together the tips of his forefingers, roguishly.

ETHEL. I am not going to blush. I do kiss Denis . . occasionally . . when he asks me.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Teasing her.*] You are blushing.

ETHEL. I am not. If you think we're ashamed of being in love, we're not, we're very proud of it. We will go and take off the billiard table cover and fold it up . . and then you can come in and play. Denis, my dear, come along solemnly, and if you flinch I'll never forgive you. [*She marches off and reaches the door before her defiant dignity breaks down; then suddenly*—] Denis, I'll race you.

And she flashes out. DENIS, *loyal, but with no histrionic instincts, follows her rather sheepishly.*

DENIS. Ethel, I can't after dinner.

MR. VOYSEY. Women play that game better than men. A man shuffles through courtship with one eye on her relations.

The Major comes stalking back, followed in a fearful flurry by his elder sister, HONOR. *Poor* HONOR [*her female friends are apt to refer to her as Poor* HONOR] *is a phenomenon common to most large families. From her earliest years she has been bottle washer to her brothers. While they were expensively educated, she was grudged schooling; her highest accomplishment was meant to be mending their clothes. Her fate is a curious survival of the intolerance of parents towards her sex until the vanity of their hunger for sons had been satisfied. In a less humane society she would have been exposed at birth. But if a very general though patronising affection, accompanied by no consideration at all, can bestow happiness,* HONOR *is not unhappy in her survival. At this moment, however, her life is a burden.*

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Honor, they are not in the dining-room.

HONOR. But they must be! Where else can they be?

She has a habit of accentuating one word in each sentence, and often the wrong one.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. That's what you ought to know.

MR. VOYSEY. [*As he moves towards the door.*] Well . . will you have a game?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. I'll play you fifty up, not more. I'm getting old.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Stopping at a dessert dish.*] Yes, these are good apples of Bearman's. I think six of my trees are spoilt this year.

HONOR. Here you are, Booth.

She triumphantly discovers the discarded box, at which the Major becomes pathetic with indignation.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Oh, Honor, don't be such a fool. These are what we've been smoking. I want the Ramon Allones.

HONOR. I don't know the difference.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. No, you don't; but you might learn.

MR. VOYSEY. [*In a voice like the crack of a very fine whip.*] Booth.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*Subduedly.*] What is it, sir?

MR. VOYSEY. Look for your cigars yourself. Honor, go back to your reading and your sewing, or whatever you were fiddling at, and fiddle in peace.

MR. VOYSEY *departs, leaving the room rather hushed.* MR. BOOTH *has not waited for this parental display. Then* ALICE *insinuates a remark very softly.*

ALICE. Have you looked in the Library?

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. [*Relapsing to an injured mutter.*] Where's Emily?

HONOR. Upstairs with little Henry; he woke up and cried.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Letting her wear herself to rags over the child . . !

HONOR. Well, she won't let me go.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Why don't you stop looking for those cigars?

HONOR. If you don't mind, I want a reel of blue silk now I'm here.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. I daresay they are in the Library. What a house!

He departs.

HONOR. Booth is so trying.

ALICE. Honor, why do you put up with it?

HONOR. Someone has to.

ALICE. [*Discreetly nibbling a nut which* EDWARD *has*

cracked for her.] I'm afraid I think Master Major Booth ought to have been taken in hand early . . with a cane.

HONOR. [*As she vaguely burrows into corners.*] Papa did. But it's never prevented him booming at us . . oh, ever since he was a baby. Now he's flustered me so I simply can't think where this blue silk is.

ALICE. All the Pettifers desired to be remembered to you, Edward.

HONOR. I must do without it. [*But she goes on looking.*] I think, Alice, that we're a very difficult family . . except perhaps Edward.

EDWARD. Why except me?

HONOR. [*Who has only excepted out of politeness to present company.*] Well, you may be difficult . . to yourself. [*Then she starts to go, threading her way through the disarranged chairs.*] Mr. Colpus will shout so loud at Mother, and she hates people to think she's so very deaf. I thought Mary Pettifer looking old . . [*And she talks herself out of the room.*]

ALICE. [*After her.*] She's getting old.

Now ALICE *does sit down; as if she'd be glad of her tête-à-tête.*

ALICE. I was glad not to spend August abroad for once. We drove into Cheltenham to a dance . . carpet. I golfed a lot.

EDWARD. How long were you with them?

ALICE. Not a fortnight. It doesn't seem three months since I was here, does it?

EDWARD. I'm down so very little.

ALICE. I'm here a disgraceful deal.

EDWARD. You know they're always pleased.

ALICE. Well, being a homeless person! But what a cart-load to descend all at once . . yesterday and to-day. The Major and Emily . . Emily's not at all well. Hugh and Mrs. Hugh. And me. Are you staying?

EDWARD. No. I must get a word with my father . .

ALICE. A business life is not healthy for you, Edward. You look more like half-baked pie-crust than usual.

EDWARD. [*A little enviously.*] You're very well.

ALICE. I'm always well, and nearly always happy.

MAJOR BOOTH returns. He has the right sort of cigar in his mouth, and is considerably mollified.

ALICE. You found them?

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Of course, they were there. Thank you very much, Alice. Now I want a knife.

ALICE. I must present you with a cigar-cutter, Booth.

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. I hate 'em. [*He eyes the dessert disparagingly.*] Nothing but silver ones.

EDWARD *hands him a carefully opened pocket knife.* Thank you, Edward. And I must take one of the candles. Something's gone wrong with the library ventilator and you never can see a thing in that room.

ALICE. Is Mrs. Hugh there?

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Writing letters. Things are neglected, Edward, unless one is constantly on the look out. The Pater only cares for his garden. I must speak seriously to Honor.

He has returned the knife, still open, and now having lit his cigar at the candle he carries this off.

ALICE. Honor has the patience of a . . of an old maid.

EDWARD. Her mission in life isn't a pleasant one. [*He gives her a nut, about the fifteenth.*] Here; 'scuse fingers.

ALICE. Thank you. [*Looking at him, with her head on one side and her face more humorous than ever.*] Edward, why have you given up proposing to me?

He starts, flushes; then won't be outdone in humour.

EDWARD. One can't go on proposing for ever.

ALICE. [*Reasonably.*] Why not? Have you seen anyone you like better?

EDWARD. No.

ALICE. Well . . I miss it.

EDWARD. What satisfaction did you find in refusing me?

ALICE. [*As she weighs the matter.*] I find satisfaction in feeling that I'm wanted.

EDWARD. Without any intention of giving yourself . . throwing yourself away.

ALICE. [*Teasing his sudden earnestness.*] Ah, now you come from mere vanity to serious questions.

EDWARD. Mine were always serious questions to you.

ALICE. That's a fault I find in you, Edward; all questions are serious to you. I call you a perfect little pocket-guide to life . . all questions and answers; what to eat, drink and avoid, what to believe and what to say . . all in the same type, the same importance attached to each.

EDWARD. [*Sententiously.*] Well . . everything matters.

ALICE. [*Making a face.*] D'you plan out every detail of your life . . every step you take . . every mouthful?

EDWARD. That would be waste of thought. One must lay down principles.

ALICE. I prefer my plan, I always do what I know I want to do. Crack me another nut.

EDWARD. Haven't you had enough?

ALICE. I k n o w I want one more.

He cracks another, with a sigh which sounds ridiculous in that connection.

EDWARD. Well, if you've never had to decide anything very serious . .

ALICE. [*With great gravity.*] Everything's serious.

EDWARD. Everything isn't vital.

ALICE. [*Skilfully manœuvring the subject.*] I've answered vital questions. I knew that I didn't want to marry you . . each time.

EDWARD. Oh, then you didn't just make a rule of saying no.

ALICE. As you proposed . . on principle? No, I al-

ways gave you a fair chance. I'll give you one now if you like.

He rouses himself to play up to this outrageous piece of flirting.

EDWARD. I'm not to be caught.

ALICE. Edward, how rude you are. [*She eats her nut contentedly.*]

EDWARD. Do other men propose to you?

ALICE. Such a thing may have happened . . when I was young. Perhaps it might even now if I were to allow it.

EDWARD. You encourage me shamelessly.

ALICE. It isn't everyone who proposes on principle. As a rule a man does it because he can't help himself. And then to be said no to . . hurts.

They are interrupted by the sudden appearance of MRS. HUGH VOYSEY, *a brisk, bright little woman, in an evening gown, which she has bullied a cheap dressmaker into making look exceedingly smart.* BEATRICE *is as hard as nails and as clever as paint. But if she keeps her feelings buried pretty deep it is because they are precious to her; and if she is impatient with fools it is because her own brains have had to win her everything in the world, so perhaps she does overvalue them a little. She speaks always with great decision and little effort.*

BEATRICE. I believe I could write important business letters upon an island in the middle of Fleet Street. But while Booth is poking at a ventilator with a billiard cue . . no, I can't.

She goes to the fireplace, waving her half finished letter.

ALICE. [*Soothingly.*] Didn't you expect Hugh back to dinner?

BEATRICE. Not specially . . He went to rout out some things from his studio. He'll come back in a filthy mess.

ALICE. Now if you listen . . Booth doesn't enjoy making a fuss by himself . . you'll hear him rout out Honor.

They listen. But what happens is that BOOTH *appears at the door, billiard cue in hand, and says solemnly . .*

MAJOR BOOTH VOYSEY. Edward, I wish you'd come and have a look at this ventilator, like a good fellow.

Then he turns and goes again, obviously with the weight of an important matter on his shoulders. With the ghost of a smile EDWARD *gets up and follows him.*

ALICE. If I belonged to this family I should hate Booth.

With which comment she joins BEATRICE *at the fireplace.*

BEATRICE. A good day's shopping?

ALICE. 'M. The baby bride and I bought clothes all the morning. Then we had lunch with Denis and bought furniture.

BEATRICE. Nice furniture?

ALICE. It'll be very good and very new. They neither of them know what they want. [*Then suddenly throwing up her chin and exclaiming.*] When it's a question of money I can understand it . . but if one can provide for oneself or is independent why get married! Especially having been brought up on the sheltered life principle . . one may as well make the most of its advantages . . one doesn't go falling in love all over the place as men seem to . . most of them. Of course with Ethel and Denis it's different. They've both been caught young. They're two little birds building their nests and it's all ideal. They'll soon forget they've ever been apart.

Now HONOR *flutters into the room, patient but wild eyed.*

HONOR. Mother wants last week's Notes and Queries. Have you seen it?

BEATRICE. [*Exasperated at the interruption.*] No.

HONOR. It ought not to be in here. [*So she proceeds to look for it.*] She's having a long argument with Mr. Colpus over Oliver Cromwell's relations.

ALICE. [*Her eyes twinkling.*] I thought Auntie didn't approve of Oliver Cromwell.

HONOR. She doesn't and she's trying to prove that he was a brewer or something. I suppose someone has taken it away.

So she gives up the search and flutters out again.

ALICE. This is a most unrestful house.

REATRICE. I once thought of putting the Voyseys into a book of mine. Then I concluded they'd be as dull there as they are anywhere else.

ALICE. They're not duller than most other people.

BEATRICE. But how very dull that is!

ALICE. They're a little noisier and perhaps not quite so well mannered. But I love them.

BEATRICE. I don't. I should have thought Love was just what they couldn't inspire.

ALICE. Of course, Hugh is unlike any of the others.

BEATRICE. He has most of their bad points. I don't love Hugh.

ALICE. [*Her eyebrows up, though she smiles.*] Beatrice, you shouldn't say so.

BEATRICE. It sounds affected, doesn't it? Never mind; when he dies I'll wear mourning . . but not weeds; I bargained against that when we were engaged.

ALICE. [*Her face growing a little thoughtful.*] Beatrice, I'm going to ask questions. You were in love with Hugh when you married him?

BEATRICE. Well . . I married him for his money.

ALICE. He hadn't much.

BEATRICE. I had none . . and I wanted to write books. Yes, I loved him.

ALICE. And you thought you'd be happy?

BEATRICE. [*Considering carefully.*] No, I didn't. I hoped he'd be happy.

ALICE. [*A little ironical.*] Did you think your writing books would make him so?

BEATRICE. My dear Alice, wouldn't you feel it a very degrading thing to have your happiness depend upon somebody else?

ALICE. [*After pausing to find her phrase.*] There's a joy of service.

BEATRICE. [*Ironical herself now.*] I forgot . . you've four hundred a year?

ALICE. What has that to do with it?

BEATRICE. [*Putting her case very precisely.*] I've had to earn my own living, consequently there isn't one thing in my life that I have ever done quite genuinely for its own sake . . but always with an eye towards bread-and-butter, pandering to the people who were to give me that. Happiness has been my only independence.

The conservatory door opens, and through it come MR. VOYSEY *and* MR. BOOTH, *in the midst of a discussion.*

MR. VOYSEY. Very well, man, stick to the shares and risk it.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. No, of course, if you seriously advise me——

MR. VOYSEY. I never advise greedy children. I let 'em overeat 'emselves, and take the consequences——

ALICE. [*Shaking a finger.*] Uncle Trench, you've been in the garden without a hat, after playing billiards in that hot room.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. We had to give up . . my wrist was bad. They've started pool.

BEATRICE. Is Booth going to play?

MR. VOYSEY. We left him instructing Ethel how to hold a cue.

BEATRICE. Perhaps I can finish my letter.

Off she goes. ALICE *is idly following with a little paper her hand has fallen on behind the clock.*

MR. VOYSEY. Don't run away, my dear.

ALICE. I'm taking this to Auntie . . Notes and Queries . . she wants it.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Damn . . this gravel's stuck to my shoe.

MR. VOYSEY. That's a new made path.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Now don't you think it's too early to have put in those plants?

MR. VOYSEY. No. We're getting frost at night already.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. I should have kept that bed a good ten feet further from the tree.

MR. VOYSEY. Nonsense. The tree's to the north of it. This room's cold. Why don't they keep the fire up! [*He proceeds to put coals on it.*]

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. You were too hot in that billiard room. You know, Voysey . . about those Alguazils?

MR. VOYSEY. [*Through the rattling of the coals.*] What?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Trying to pierce the din.*] Those Alguazils.

MR. VOYSEY, *with surprising inconsequence, points a finger at the silk handkerchief across* MR. BOOTH'S *shirt front.*

MR. VOYSEY. What d'you put your handkerchief there for?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Measure of precau— [*At that moment he sneezes.*] Damn it . . if you've given me a chill dragging me round your infernal garden——

MR. VOYSEY. [*Slapping him on the back.*] You're an old crook.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Well, I'll be glad of this winter in Egypt. [*He returns to his subject.*] And if you think seriously that I ought to sell out of the Alguazils before I go . . ? [*He looks with childlike enquiry at his friend, who is apparently yawning slightly.*] Why can't you take them in charge? . . and I'll give you a power of attorney or whatever it is . . and you can sell out if things look bad.

At this moment PHŒBE, *the middle aged parlour-maid, comes in, tray in hand. Like an expert fisherman,* MR. VOYSEY *once more lets loose the thread of the conversation.*

MR. VOYSEY. D'you want to clear?

PHŒBE. It doesn't matter, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. No, go on . . go on.

So MARY, *the young housemaid, comes in as well, and the two start to clear the table. All of which fidgets poor* MR. BOOTH *considerably. He sits shrivelled up in his armchair by the fire; and now* MR. VOYSEY *attends to him.*

MR. VOYSEY. What d'you want with high interest at all . . you never spend half your income?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. I like to feel that my money is doing some good in the world. These mines are very useful things, and forty-two per cent. is pleasing.

MR. VOYSEY. You're an old gambler.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Propitiatingly.*] Ah, but then I've you to advise me. I always do as you tell me in the end, now you can't deny that.

MR. VOYSEY. The man who don't know must trust in the man who does! [*He yawns again.*]

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Modestly insisting.*] There's five thousand in Alguazils—what else could we put it into?

MR. VOYSEY. I can get you something at four and a half.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Oh, Lord . . that's nothing.

MR. VOYSEY. [*With a sudden serious friendliness.*] I

wish, my dear George, you'd invest more on your own account. You know—what with one thing and the other—I've got control of practically all you have in the world. I might be playing old Harry with it for all you know.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Overflowing with confidence.*] My dear feller . . if I'm satisfied! Ah, my friend, what'll happen to your firm when you depart this life! . . not before my time, I hope, though.

MR. VOYSEY. [*With a little frown.*] What d'ye mean?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Edward's no use.

MR. VOYSEY. I beg your pardon . . very sound in business.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. May be . . but I tell you he's no use. Too many principles, as I said just now. Men have confidence in a personality, not in principles. Where would you be without the confidence of your clients?

MR. VOYSEY. [*Candidly.*] True!

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. He'll never gain that.

MR. VOYSEY. I fear you dislike Edward.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*With pleasant frankness.*] Yes, I do.

MR. VOYSEY. That's a pity.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*With a flattering smile.*] Well, he's not his father and never will be. What's the time?

MR. VOYSEY. [*With inappropriate thoughtfulness.*] Twenty to ten.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. I must be trotting.

MR. VOYSEY. It's very early.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Oh, and I've not said a word to Mrs. Voysey . .

As he goes to the door he meets EDWARD, *who comes in apparently looking for his father; at any rate catches his eye immediately, while* MR. BOOTH *obliviously continues.*

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Will you stroll round home with me?

MR. VOYSEY. I can't.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Mildly surprised at the short reply.*] Well, good night. Good night, Edward.

He trots away.

MR. VOYSEY. Leave the rest of the table, Phœbe.

PHŒBE. Yes, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. You can come back in ten minutes.

PHŒBE *and* MARY *depart and the door is closed. Alone with his son* MR. VOYSEY *does not move; his face grows a little keener, that's all.*

MR. VOYSEY. Well, Edward?

EDWARD *starts to move restlessly about, like a cowed animal in a cage; silently for a moment or two. Then when he speaks, his voice is toneless and he doesn't look at his father.*

EDWARD. I should like you now, sir, if you don't mind, to drop with me all these protestations about putting the firm's affairs straight, and all your anxieties and sacrifices to that end. I see now, of course . . what a cleverer man than I could have seen yesterday . . that for some time, ever since, I suppose, you recovered from the first shock and got used to the double dealing, this hasn't been your object at all. You've used your clients' capital to produce your own income . . to bring us up and endow us with. Booth's ten thousand pounds; what you are giving Ethel on her marriage . . It's odd it never struck me yesterday that my own pocket money as a boy was probably withdrawn from some client's account. You've been very generous to us all, Father. I suppose about half the sum you've spent on us would have put things right.

MR. VOYSEY. No, it would not.

EDWARD. [*Appealing for the truth.*] Oh . . at some time or other!

MR. VOYSEY. Well, if there have been good times there have been bad times. At present the three hundred a year I'm to allow your sister is going to be rather a pull.

EDWARD. Three hundred a year . . and yet you've never attempted to put a single account straight. Since it isn't lunacy, sir . . I can only conclude that you enjoy being in this position.

MR. VOYSEY. I have put accounts absolutely straight . . at the winding up of a trust for instance . . at great inconvenience too. And to all appearances they've been above suspicion. What's the object of all this rodomontade, Edward?

EDWARD. If I'm to remain in the firm, it had better be with a very clear understanding of things as they are.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Firmly, not too anxiously.*] Then you do remain?

EDWARD. [*In a very low voice.*] Yes, I remain.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Quite gravely.*] That's wise of you . . I'm very glad. [*And he is silent for a moment.*] And now we needn't discuss the impractical side of it any more.

EDWARD. But I want to make one condition. And I want some information.

MR. VOYSEY. [*His sudden cheerfulness relapsing again.*] Well?

EDWARD. Of course no one has ever discovered . . and no one suspects this state of things?

MR. VOYSEY. Peacey knows.

EDWARD. Peacey!

MR. VOYSEY. His father found out.

EDWARD. Oh. Does he draw hush money?

MR. VOYSEY. [*Curling a little at the word.*] It is my custom to make a little present every Christmas. Not a cheque . . notes in an envelope. [*He becomes benevolent.*] I don't grude the money . . Peacey's a devoted fellow.

EDWARD. Naturally this would be a heavily taxed in-

dustry. [*Then he smiles at his vision of the mild old clerk.*] Peacey! There's another thing I want to ask, sir. Have you ever under stress of circumstances done worse than just make use of a client's capital? You boasted to me yesterday that no one had ever suffered in pocket because of you. Is that absolutely true?

MR. VOYSEY *draws himself up, dignified and magniloquent.*

MR. VOYSEY. My dear Edward, for the future my mind is open to you, you can discover for yourself how matters stand to-day. But I decline to gratify your curiosity as to what is over and done with.

EDWARD. [*With entire comprehension.*] Thank you, sir. The condition I wish to make is that we should really do what we have pretended to be doing . . try and put the accounts straight.

MR. VOYSEY. [*With a little polite shrug.*] I've no doubt you'll prove an abler man of business than I.

EDWARD. One by one.

MR. VOYSEY. Which one will you begin with?

EDWARD. I shall begin, Father, by halving the salary I draw from the firm.

MR. VOYSEY. I see . . Retrenchment and Reform.

EDWARD. And I think you cannot give Ethel this five thousand pounds dowry.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Shortly, with one of the quick twists of his eye.*] I have given my word to Denis.

EDWARD. The money isn't yours to give.

MR. VOYSEY. [*In an indignant crescendo.*] I should not dream of depriving Ethel of what, as my daughter, she has every right to expect. I am surprised at your suggesting such a thing.

EDWARD. [*Pale and firm.*] I'm set on this, Father.

MR. VOYSEY. Don't be such a fool, Edward. What

would it look like . . suddenly to refuse without rhyme or reason? What would old Tregoning think?

EDWARD. [*Distressed.*] You could give them a reason.

MR. VOYSEY. Perhaps you'll invent one.

EDWARD. If need be, Ethel should be told the truth.

MR. VOYSEY. What!

EDWARD. I know it would hurt her.

MR. VOYSEY. And Denis told too, I suppose?

EDWARD. Father, it is my duty to do whatever is necessary to prevent this.

MR. VOYSEY. It'll be necessary to tell the nearest policeman. It is my duty to pay no more attention to these scruples of yours than a nurse pays to her child's tantrums. Understand, Edward, I don't want to force you to continue my partner. Come with me gladly or don't come at all.

EDWARD. [*Dully.*] It is my duty to be of what use I can to you, sir. Father, I want to save you if I can.

He flashes into this exclamation of almost broken-hearted affection. MR. VOYSEY *looks at his son for a moment and his lip quivers. Then he steels himself.*

MR. VOYSEY. Thank you! I have saved myself quite satisfactorily for the last thirty years, and you must please believe that by this time I know my own business best.

EDWARD. [*Hopelessly.*] Let the money come some other way. How is your own income regulated?

MR. VOYSEY. I have a bank balance and a cheque book, haven't I? I spend what I think well to spend. What's the use of earmarking this or that as my own? You say none of it is my own. I might say it's all my own. I think I've earned it.

EDWARD. [*Anger coming on him.*] That's what I can't forgive. If you'd lived poor . . if you'd really devoted your skill to your clients' good and not to your aggrandisement . . then, even though things were only as they are

now, I could have been proud of you. But, Father, own the truth to me, at least . . that's my due from you, considering how I'm placed by all you've done. Didn't you simply seize this opportunity as a means to your own end, to your own enriching?

MR. VOYSEY. [*With a sledge hammer irony.*] Certainly. I sat that morning in my father's office, studying the helmet of the policeman in the street below, and thinking what a glorious path I had happened on to wealth and honour and renown. [*Then he begins to bully* EDWARD *in the kindliest way.*] My dear boy, you evidently haven't begun to grasp the A B C of my position. What has carried me to victory? The confidence of my clients. What has earned that confidence? A decent life, my integrity, my brains? No, my reputation for wealth . . that, and nothing else. Business now-a-days is run on the lines of the confidence trick. What makes old George Booth so glad to trust me with every penny he possesses? Not affection . . he's never cared for anything in his life but his collection of prints. No; he imagines that I have as big a stake in the country, as he calls it, as he has, and he's perfectly happy.

EDWARD. [*Stupefied, helpless.*] So he's involved!

MR. VOYSEY. Of course he's involved, and he's always after high interest, too . . it's little one makes out of him. But there's a further question here, Edward. Should I have had confidence in myself if I'd remained a poor man? No, I should not. You must either be the master of money or its servant. And if one is not opulent in one's daily life one loses that wonderful . . financier's touch. One must be confident oneself . . and I saw from the first that I must inspire confidence. My whole public and private life has tended to that. All my surroundings . . you and your brothers and sisters that I have brought into, and up, and

put out in the world so worthily . . you in your turn inspire confidence.

EDWARD. Not our worth, not our abilities, nor our virtues, but the fact that we travel first class and ride in hansoms.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Impatiently.*] Well, I haven't organised Society upon a basis of wealth.

EDWARD. Is every single person who trusts you involved in your system?

MR. VOYSEY. What new hole are you finding to pick in my conduct?

EDWARD. My mind travelled naturally from George Booth, with his big income, to old Nursie, with her savings which she brought you to invest. You've let those be, at least.

MR. VOYSEY. I never troubled to invest them . . it wasn't worth while.

EDWARD. Father!

MR. VOYSEY. D'you know what she brought me? . . five hundred pounds.

EDWARD. That's damnable.

MR. VOYSEY. Indeed. I give her seventy-five pounds a year for it. Would you like to take charge of that account, Edward? I'll give you five hundred to invest to-morrow.

EDWARD, *hopelessly beaten, falls into an almost comic state of despair.*

EDWARD. My dear Father, putting every moral question aside . . it's all very well your playing Robin Hood in this magnificent manner; but have you given a moment's thought to the sort of inheritance you'll be leaving me?

MR. VOYSEY. [*Pleased for the first time.*] Ah! That is a question you have every right to ask.

EDWARD. If you died to-morrow, could we pay eight shillings in the pound . . or seventeen . . or five? Do you know?

MR. VOYSEY. And my answer is, that by your help I have every intention, when I die, of leaving a will behind me of property to you all running into six figures. D'you think I've given my life and my talents to this money making for a less result than that? I'm fond of you all . . and I want you to be proud of me . . and I mean that the name of Voysey shall be carried high in the world by my children and grandchildren. Don't you be afraid, Edward. Ah, you lack experience, my boy . . you're not full grown yet . . your impulses are a bit chaotic. You emotionalise over your work, and you reason about your emotions. You must sort yourself. You must realise that money making is one thing, and religion another, and family-life a third . . and that if we apply our energies whole-heartedly to each of these in turn, and realise that different laws govern each, that there is a different end to be served, a different ideal to be striven for in each——

His coherence is saved by the sudden appearance of his wife, who comes round the door, smiling benignly. Not in the least put out, in fact, a little relieved, he greets her with an affectionate shout, for she is very deaf.

MR. VOYSEY. Hullo, Mother!

MRS. VOYSEY. Oh, there you are, Trench. I've been deserted.

MR. VOYSEY. George Booth gone?

MRS. VOYSEY. Are you talking business? Perhaps you don't want me.

MR. VOYSEY. No, no . . no business.

MRS. VOYSEY. [*Who has not looked for his answer.*] I suppose the others are in the billiard room.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Vociferously.*] We're not talking business, old lady.

EDWARD. I'll be off, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Genial as usual.*] Why don't you stay? I'll come up with you in the morning.

EDWARD. No, thank you, sir.

MR. VOYSEY. Then I shall be up about noon to-morrow.

EDWARD. Good-night, Mother.

MRS. VOYSEY *places a plump, kindly hand on his arm and looks up affectionately.*

MRS. VOYSEY. You look tired.

EDWARD. No, I'm not.

MRS. VOYSEY. What did you say?

EDWARD. [*Too weary to repeat himself.*] Nothing, Mother dear.

He kisses her cheek, while she kisses the air.

MR. VOYSEY. Good-night, my boy.

Then he goes. MRS. VOYSEY *is carrying her Notes and Queries. This is a dear old lady, looking older, too, than probably she is. Placid describes her. She has had a life of little joys and cares, has never measured herself against the world, never even questioned the shape and size of the little corner of it in which she lives. She has loved an indulgent husband, and borne eight children, six of them surviving, healthy. That is her history.*

MRS. VOYSEY. George Booth went some time ago. He said he thought you'd taken a chill walking round the garden.

MR. VOYSEY. I'm all right.

MRS. VOYSEY. D'you think you have?

MR. VOYSEY. [*In her ear.*] No.

MRS. VOYSEY. You should be careful, Trench. What did you put on?

MR. VOYSEY. Nothing.

MRS. VOYSEY. How very foolish! Let me feel your hand. You are quite feverish.

MR. VOYSEY. [*Affectionately.*] You're a fuss-box, old lady.

MRS. VOYSEY. [*Coquetting with him.*] Don't be rude, Trench.

HONOR *descends upon them. She is well into that nightly turmoil of putting everything and everybody to rights which always precedes her bed-time. She carries a shawl which she clasps round her mother's shoulders, her mind and gaze already on the next thing to be done.*

HONOR. Mother, you left your shawl in the drawing-room. Can they finish clearing?

MR. VOYSEY. [*Arranging the folds of the shawl with real tenderness.*] Now who's careless!

PHŒBE *comes into the room.*

HONOR. Phœbe, finish here and then you must bring in the tray for Mr. Hugh.

MRS. VOYSEY. [*Having looked at the shawl, and* HONOR, *and connected the matter in her mind.*] Thank you, Honor. You'd better look after your Father; he's been walking round the garden without his cape.

HONOR. Papa!

MR. VOYSEY. Phœbe, you get that little kettle and boil it, and brew me some hot whiskey and water. I shall be all right.

HONOR. [*Fluttering more than ever.*] I'll get it. Where's the whiskey? And Hugh coming back at ten o'clock with no dinner. No wonder his work goes wrong. Here it is. Papa, you do deserve to be ill.

Clasping the whiskey decanter, she is off again. MRS. VOYSEY *sits at the dinner table and adjusts her spectacles. She returns to Notes and Queries, one elbow firmly planted and her plump hand against her plump cheek. This is her favourite attitude; and she is apt, when reading, to soliloquise*

in her deaf woman's voice. At least, whether she considers it soliloquy or conversation, is not easy to discover. MR. VOYSEY *stands with his back to the fire, grumbling and pulling faces.*

MRS. VOYSEY. This is a very perplexing correspondence about the Cromwell family. One can't deny the man had good blood in him . . his grandfather Sir Henry, his uncle Sir Oliver . . and it's difficult to discover where the taint crept in.

MR. VOYSEY. There's a pain in my back. I believe I strained myself putting in all those strawberry plants.

MARY, *the house parlour maid, carries in a tray of warmed-up dinner for* HUGH *and plants it on the table.*

MRS. VOYSEY. Yes, but then how was it he came to disgrace himself so? I believe the family disappeared. Regicide is a root and branch curse. You must read this letter signed C. W. A. . . it's quite interesting. There's a misprint in mine about the first umbrella maker . . now where was it . . [*And so the dear lady will ramble on indefinitely.*]

THE THIRD ACT

The dining-room looks very different in the white light of a July noon. Moreover on this particular day, it isn't even its normal self. There is a peculiar luncheon spread on the table. The embroidered cloth is placed cornerwise and on it are decanters of port and sherry; sandwiches, biscuits and an uncut cake; two little piles of plates and one little pile of napkins. There are no table decorations and indeed the whole room has been made as bare and as tidy as possible. Such preparations denote one of the recognised English festivities, and the appearance of PHŒBE, *the maid, who has just completed them, the set solemnity of her face and the added touches of black to her dress and cap, suggest that this is probably a funeral. When* MARY *comes in the fact that she has evidently been crying and that she decorously does not raise her voice above an unpleasant whisper makes it quite certain.*

MARY. Phœbe, they're coming . . and I forgot one of the blinds in the drawing room.

PHŒBE. Well, pull it up quick and make yourself scarce. I'll open the door.

MARY *got rid of,* PHŒBE *composes her face still more rigorously into the aspect of formal grief and with a touch to her apron as well goes to admit the funeral party. The first to enter are* MRS. VOYSEY *and* MR. BOOTH, *she on his arm; and the fact that*

she is in widow's weeds makes the occasion clear. The little old man leads his old friend very tenderly.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Will you come in here?

MRS. VOYSEY. Thank you.

With great solicitude he puts her in a chair; then takes her hand.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Now I'll intrude no longer.

MRS. VOYSEY. You'll take some lunch?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. No.

MRS. VOYSEY. Not a glass of wine?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. If there's anything I can do just send round.

MRS. VOYSEY. Thank you.

He reaches the door, only to be met by the Major and his wife. He shakes hands with them both.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. My dear Emily! My dear Booth! EMILY *is a homely, patient, pale little woman of about thirty-five. She looks smaller than usual in her heavy black dress and is meeker than usual on an occasion of this kind. The Major, on the other hand, though his grief is most sincere, has an irresistible air of being responsible for, and indeed rather proud of the whole affair.*

BOOTH. I think it all went off as he would have wished.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Feeling that he is called on for praise.*] Great credit . . great credit.

He makes another attempt to escape and is stopped this time by TRENCHARD VOYSEY, *to whom he is extending a hand and beginning his formula. But* TRENCHARD *speaks first.*

TRENCHARD. Have you the right time?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Taken aback and fumbling for his watch.*] I think so . . I make it fourteen minutes to one. [*He seizes the occasion.*] Trenchard, as a very old and dear friend of your father's, you won't mind me saying

how glad I was that you were present to-day. Death closes all. Indeed . . it must be a great regret to you that you did not see him before . . before . .

TRENCHARD. [*His cold eye freezing this little gush.*] I don't think he asked for me.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Stoppered.*] No? No! Well . . well . . .

At this third attempt to depart he actually collides with someone in the doorway. It is HUGH VOYSEY.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. My dear Hugh . . I won't intrude. *Quite determined to escape, he grasps his hand, gasps out his formula and is off.* TRENCHARD *and* HUGH, *eldest and youngest son, are as unlike each other as it is possible for* VOYSEYS *to be, but that isn't very unlike.* TRENCHARD *has in excelsis the cocksure manner of the successful barrister;* HUGH *the rather sweet though querulous air of diffidence and scepticism belonging to the unsuccessful man of letters, or artist. The self-respect of* TRENCHARD'S *appearance is immense, and he cultivates that air of concentration upon any trivial matter, or even upon nothing at all, which will some day make him an impressive figure upon the Bench.* HUGH *is always vague, searching Heaven or the corners of the room for inspiration, and even on this occasion his tie is abominably crooked. The inspissated gloom of this assembly, to which each member of the family, as he arrives, adds his share, is unbelievable. Instinct apparently leads them to reproduce as nearly as possible the appearance and conduct of the corpse on which their minds are fixed.* HUGH *is depressed partly at the inadequacy of his grief:* TRENCHARD *conscientiously preserves an air of the indifference which he feels;* BOOTH *stands statuesque at the mantelpiece; while* EMILY *is by* MRS. VOYSEY, *whose face*

in its quiet grief is, nevertheless, a mirror of many happy memories of her husband.

BOOTH. I wouldn't hang over her, Emily.

EMILY. No, of course not.

Apologetically, she sits by the table.

TRENCHARD. I hope your wife is well, Hugh?

HUGH. Thank you, Trench; I think so. Beatrice is in America . . on business.

TRENCHARD. Really!

There comes in a small, well groomed, bullet headed boy in Etons. This is the Major's eldest son. Looking scared and solemn, he goes straight to his mother.

EMILY. Now be very quiet, Christopher . .

Then DENIS TREGONING *appears.*

TRENCHARD. Oh, Tregoning, did you bring Honor back?

DENIS. Yes.

BOOTH. [*At the table.*] A glass of wine, Mother.

MRS. VOYSEY. What?

BOOTH *hardly knows how to turn his whisper decorously into enough of a shout for his mother to hear. But he manages it.*

BOOTH. Have a glass of wine?

MRS. VOYSEY. Sherry, please.

While he pours it out with an air of its being medicine on this occasion, and not wine at all, EDWARD *comes quickly into the room, his face very set, his mind obviously on other matters than the funeral. No one speaks to him for the moment, and he has time to observe them all.* TRENCHARD *is continuing his talk to* DENIS.

TRENCHARD. Give my love to Ethel. Is she ill that——

TREGONING. Not exactly, but she couldn't very well be with us. I thought perhaps you might have heard. We're expecting . .

He hesitates with the bashfulness of a young husband. TRENCHARD *helps him out with a citizen's bow of respect for a citizen's duty.*

TRENCHARD. Indeed. I congratulate you. I hope all will be well. Please give my love . . my best love to Ethel.

BOOTH. [*In an awful voice.*] Lunch, Emily?

EMILY. [*Scared.*] I suppose so, Booth, thank you.

BOOTH. I think the boy had better run away and play . . [*He checks himself on the word.*] Well, take a book, and keep quiet; d'ye hear me, Christopher?

CHRISTOPHER, *who looks incapable of a sound, gazes at his father with round eyes.* EMILY *whispers "Library" to him, and adds a kiss in acknowledgment of his good behaviour. After a moment he slips out, thankfully.*

EDWARD. How's Ethel, Denis?

TREGONING. A little smashed, of course, but no harm done.

ALICE MAITLAND *comes in, brisk and businesslike, a little impatient of this universal cloud of mourning.*

ALICE. Edward, Honor has gone to her room. I want to take her some food and make her eat it. She's very upset.

EDWARD. Make her drink a glass of wine, and say it is necessary she should come down here. And d'you mind not coming back yourself, Alice?

ALICE. [*Her eyebrows up.*] Certainly, if you wish.

BOOTH. [*Overhearing.*] What's this? What's this?

Alice gets her glass of wine, and goes. The Major is suddenly full of importance.

BOOTH. What is this, Edward?

EDWARD. I have something to say to you all.

BOOTH. What?

EDWARD. Well, Booth, you'll hear when I say it.

BOOTH. Is it business? . . because I think this is scarcely the time for business.

EDWARD. Why?

BOOTH. Do you find it easy and reverent to descend from your natural grief to the consideration of money . .? I do not. [*He finds* TRENCHARD *at his elbow.*] I hope you are getting some lunch, Trenchard.

EDWARD. This is business, and more than business, Booth. I choose now, because it is something I wish to say to the family, not write to each individually . . and it will be difficult to get us all together again.

BOOTH. [*Determined, at any rate, to give his sanction.*] Well, Trenchard, as Edward is in the position of trustee—executor . . I don't know your terms . . I suppose there's nothing more to be said.

TRENCHARD. I don't see what your objection is.

BOOTH. [*With some superiority.*] Don't you? I should not have called myself a sentimental man, but . .

EDWARD. You had better stay, Denis; you represent Ethel.

TREGONING. [*Who has not heard the beginning of this.*] Why? . .

HONOR *has obediently come down from her room. She is pale and thin, shaken with grief and worn out besides; for, needless to say, the brunt of her father's illness, the brunt of everything, has been on her. Six weeks' nursing, part of it hopeless, will exhaust anyone. Her handkerchief to her eyes, and every minute or two she cascades tears.* EDWARD *goes and affectionately puts his arm round her.*

EDWARD. My dear Honor, I am sorry to be so . . so merciless. There! . . there! [*He hands her into the room; then shuts the door; then turns and once more surveys the family, who this time mostly return the compliment. Then he says shortly.*] I think you might all sit

down. [*But he goes close to his mother and speaks very distinctly, very kindly.*] Mother, we're all going to have a little necessary talk over matters . . now, because it's most convenient. I hope it won't . . I hope you don't mind. Will you come to the table?

MRS. VOYSEY *looks up as if understanding more than he says.*

MRS. VOYSEY. Edward . .

EDWARD. Yes, mother?

BOOTH. [*Commandingly.*] You'll sit here, mother, of course.

He places her in her accustomed chair at the foot of the table. One by one the others sit down, EDWARD *apparently last. But then he discovers that* HUGH *has lost himself in a corner of the room and is gazing into vacancy.*

EDWARD. Hugh, would you mind attending?

HUGH. What is it?

EDWARD. There's a chair.

HUGH *takes it. Then for a minute—while* EDWARD *is trying to frame in coherent sentences what he must say to them—for a minute there is silence, broken only by* HONOR'S *sniffs, which culminate at last in a noisy little cascade of tears.*

BOOTH. Honor, control yourself.

And to emphasise his own perfect control he helps himself majestically to a glass of sherry. Then says . .

BOOTH. Well, Edward?

EDWARD. I'll come straight to the point which concerns you. Our father's will gives certain sums to you all . . the gross amount something over a hundred thousand pounds. There will be no money.

He can get no further than the bare statement, which is received only with varying looks of be-

wilderment, until MRS. VOYSEY, *discovering nothing from their faces, breaks this second silence.*

MRS. VOYSEY. I didn't hear.

HUGH. [*In his mother's ear.*] Edward says there's no money.

TRENCHARD. [*Precisely.*] I think you said . . 'will be.'

BOOTH. [*In a tone of mitigated thunder.*] Why will there be no money?

EDWARD. [*Letting himself go.*] Because every penny by right belongs to those clients whom our father spent his life in defrauding. When I say defrauding, I mean it in its worst sense . . swindling . . thieving. I have been in the swim of it, for the past year . . oh, you don't know the sink of iniquity . . and therefore I mean to collect every penny, any money that you can give me; put the firm into bankruptcy; pay back all these people what we can. I'll stand my trial . . it'll come to that with me . . and as soon as possible. [*He pauses, partly for breath, and glares at them all.*] Are none of you going to speak? Quite right, what is there to be said! [*Then with a gentle afterthought.*] I'm sorry to hurt you, mother.

The VOYSEY *family is simply buried deep by this avalanche of horror.* MRS. VOYSEY, *though, who has been watching* EDWARD *closely, says very calmly.*

MRS. VOYSEY. I can't hear quite all you say, but I guess what it is. You don't hurt me, Edward . . I have known of this for a long time.

EDWARD. [*With almost a cry.*] Oh, mother, did he know you knew?

MRS. VOYSEY. What do you say?

TRENCHARD. [*Collected and dry.*] I may as well tell you, Edward, I suspected everything wasn't right about the time of my last quarrel with my father. Of course, I took care not to pursue my suspicions. Was father aware that you knew, Mother?

MRS. VOYSEY. We never discussed it. There was once a great danger . . when you were all younger . . of his being found out. But we never discussed it.

EDWARD. [*Swallowing a fresh bitterness.*] I'm glad it isn't such a shock to all of you.

HUGH. [*Alive to a dramatic aspect of the matter.*] My God . . before the earth has settled on his grave!

EDWARD. I thought it wrong to postpone telling you.

HONOR, the word swindling having spelt itself out in her mind, at last gives way to a burst of piteous grief.

HONOR. Oh, poor papa! . . poor papa!

EDWARD. [*Comforting her kindly.*] Honor, we shall want your help and advice.

The Major has recovered from the shock, to swell with importance. It being necessary to make an impression he instinctively turns first to his wife.

BOOTH. I think, Emily, there was no need for you to have been present at this exposure, and that now you had better retire.

EMILY. Very well, Booth.

She gets up to go, conscious of her misdemeanour. But as she reaches the door, an awful thought strikes the Major.

BOOTH. Good Heavens . . I hope the servants haven't been listening! See where they are, Emily . . and keep them away, distract them. Open the door suddenly. [*She does so, more or less, and there is no one behind it.*] That's all right.

Having watched his wife's departure, he turns with gravity to his brother.

BOOTH. I have said nothing as yet, Edward. I am thinking.

TRENCHARD. [*A little impatient at this exhibition.*] That's the worst of these family practices . . a lot of

money knocking around and no audit ever required. The wonder to me is to find an honest solicitor at all.

BOOTH. Really, Trenchard!

TRENCHARD. Well, the more able a man is the less the word Honesty bothers him . . and the Pater was an able man.

EDWARD. I thought that a year ago, Trenchard. I thought that at the worst he was a splendid criminal.

BOOTH. Really . . really, Edward!

EDWARD. And everything was to come right in the end . . we were all to be in reality as wealthy and as prosperous as we have seemed to be all these years. But when he fell ill . . towards the last he couldn't keep the facts from me any longer.

TRENCHARD. And these are?

EDWARD. Laughable. You wouldn't believe there were such fools in the world as some of these wretched clients have been. I tell you the firm's funds were just a lucky bag into which he dipped. Now sometimes their money doesn't even exist.

BOOTH. Where's it gone?

EDWARD. [*Very directly.*] You've been living on it.

BOOTH. Good God!

TRENCHARD. What can you pay in the pound?

EDWARD. Without help? . . six or seven shillings, I daresay. But we must do better than that.

To which there is no response.

BOOTH. All this is very dreadful. Does it mean beggary for the whole family?

EDWARD. Yes, it should.

TRENCHARD. [*Sharply.*] Nonsense!

EDWARD. [*Joining issue at once.*] What right have we to a thing we possess?

TRENCHARD. He didn't make you an allowance, Booth . . your capital's your own, isn't it?

BOOTH. [*Awkwardly placed between the two of them.*] Really . . I—I suppose so.

TRENCHARD. Then that's all right.

EDWARD. [*Vehemently.*] It's stolen money.

TRENCHARD. Booth took it in good faith.

BOOTH. I should hope so.

EDWARD. [*Dwelling on the words.*] It's stolen money.

BOOTH. [*Bubbling with distress.*] I say, what ought I to do?

TRENCHARD. Do . . my dear Booth? Nothing.

EDWARD. [*With great indignation.*] Trenchard, we owe reparation——

TRENCHARD. [*Readily.*] To whom? From which account was Booth's money taken?

EDWARD. [*Side tracked for the moment.*] I don't know . . I daresay from none directly.

TRENCHARD. Very well, then.

EDWARD. [*Grieved.*] Trenchard, you argue as he did——

TRENCHARD. Nonsense, my dear Edward. The law will take anything it has a right to, and all it can get; you needn't be afraid. There's no obligation, legal or moral, for us to throw our pounds into the wreck, that they may become pence.

EDWARD. I can hear him.

TRENCHARD. But what about your own position . . can we get you clear?

EDWARD. That doesn't matter.

BOOTH'S head has been turning incessantly from one to the other, and by this he is just a bristle of alarm.

BOOTH. But I say, you know, this is awful! Will this have to be made public?

TRENCHARD. No help for it.

The Major's jaw drops; he is speechless. MRS. VOYSEY'S *dead voice steals in.*

MRS. VOYSEY. What is all this?

TRENCHARD. Edward wishes us to completely beggar ourselves in order to pay back to every client to whom father owed a pound perhaps ten shillings instead of seven.

MRS. VOYSEY. He will find that my estate has been kept quite separate.

EDWARD *hides his face in his hands.*

TRENCHARD. I'm very glad to hear it, Mother.

MRS. VOYSEY. When Mr. Barnes died, your father agreed to appointing another trustee.

TREGONING. [*Diffidently.*] I suppose, Edward, I'm involved.

EDWARD. [*Lifting his head quickly.*] Denis, I hope not. I didn't know that anything of yours——

TREGONING. Yes . . all that I got under my aunt's will.

EDWARD. You see how things are . . I've discovered no trace of that. We'll hope for the best.

TREGONING. [*Setting his teeth.*] It can't be helped.

MAJOR BOOTH *leans over the table and speaks in the loudest of whispers.*

BOOTH. Let me advise you to say nothing of this to Ethel at such a critical time.

TREGONING. Thank you, Booth, naturally I shall not.

HUGH, *by a series of contortions, has lately been giving evidence of a desire or intention to say something.*

EDWARD. Well, what is it, Hugh?

HUGH. I have been wondering . . if he can hear this conversation.

Up to now it has all been meaningless to HONOR, *in her nervous dilapidation, but this remark brings a fresh burst of tears.*

HONOR. Oh, poor papa . . poor papa!

MRS. VOYSEY. I think I'll go to my room. I can't hear what any of you are saying. Edward can tell me afterwards.

EDWARD. Would you like to go, too, Honor?

HONOR. [*Through her sobs.*] Yes, please, I would.

TREGONING. And I'll get out, Edward. Whatever you think fit to do . . Oh, well, I suppose there's only one thing to be done.

EDWARD. Only that.

TREGONING. I wish I were in a better position as to work, for Ethel's sake and—and the child's.

EDWARD. Shall I speak to Trenchard?

TREGONING. No . . he knows I exist in a wig and gown. If I can be useful to him, he'll be useful to me, I daresay. Good-bye, Hugh. Good-bye, Booth.

By this time MRS. VOYSEY *and* HONOR *have been got out of the room;* TREGONING *follows them. So the four brothers are left together.* HUGH *is vacant,* EDWARD *does not speak,* BOOTH *looks at* TRENCHARD, *who settles himself to acquire information.*

TRENCHARD. How long have things been wrong?

EDWARD. He told me the trouble began in his father's time, and that he'd been battling with it ever since.

TRENCHARD. [*Smiling.*] Oh, come now .. that's impossible.

EDWARD. But I believed him! Now I look through his papers, I can find only one irregularity that's more than ten years old, and that's only to do with old George Booth's business.

BOOTH. But the Pater never touched his money . . why, he was a personal friend.

EDWARD. Did you hear what Denis said?

TRENCHARD.. Very curious his evolving that fiction about his father . . I wonder why. I remember the old man. He was as honest as the day.

EDWARD. To gain sympathy, I suppose.

TRENCHARD. I think one can trace the psychology of it deeper than that. It would add a fitness to the situation

. . his handing on to you an inheritance he had received. You know every criminal has a touch of the artist in him.

HUGH. [*Suddenly roused.*] That's true.

TRENCHARD. What position did you take upon the matter when he told you?

EDWARD. [*Shrugging.*] You know what the Pater was as well as I.

TRENCHARD. Well . . what did you attempt to do?

EDWARD. I urged him to start by making some of the smaller accounts right. He said . . he said that would be penny wise and pound foolish. So I did what I could myself.

TRENCHARD. With your own money?

EDWARD. The little I had.

TRENCHARD. Can you prove that you did that?

EDWARD. I suppose I could.

TRENCHARD. It's a good point.

BOOTH. [*Not to be quite left out.*] Yes, I must say——

TRENCHARD. You ought to have written him a letter, and left the firm the moment you found out. Even then, legally . . ! But as he was your father. What was his object in telling you? What did he expect you to do?

EDWARD. I've thought of every reason . . and now I really believe it was that he might have someone to boast to of his financial exploits.

TRENCHARD. [*Appreciatively.*] I daresay.

BOOTH. Scarcely matters to boast of.

TRENCHARD. Oh, you try playing the fool with other people's money, and keeping your neck out of the noose for twelve years. It's not so easy.

EDWARD. Then, of course, he always protested that things would come right . . that he'd clear the firm and have a fortune to the good. Or that if he were not spared I might do it. But he must have known that was impossible,

TRENCHARD. But there's the gambler all over.

EDWARD. Why, he actually took the trouble to draw up this will!

TRENCHARD. That was childish.

EDWARD. I'm the sole executor.

TRENCHARD. So I should think . . Was I down for anything?

EDWARD. No.

TRENCHARD. [*Without resentment.*] How he did hate me!

EDWARD. You're safe from the results of his affection, anyway.

TRENCHARD. What on earth made you stay in the firm, once you knew?

EDWARD *does not answer for a moment.*

EDWARD. I thought I might prevent things from getting any worse. I think I did . . well, I should have done that if he'd lived.

TRENCHARD. You knew the risk you were running?

EDWARD. [*Bowing his head.*] Yes.

TRENCHARD, *the only one of the three who comprehends, looks at his brother for a moment with something that might almost be admiration. Then he stirs himself.*

TRENCHARD. I must be off. Business waiting . . end of term, you know.

BOOTH. Shall I walk to the station with you?

TRENCHARD. I'll spend a few minutes with Mother. [*He says, at the door, very respectfully.*] You'll count on my professional assistance, please, Edward.

EDWARD. [*Simply.*] Thank you, Trenchard.

So TRENCHARD *goes. And the Major, who has been endeavouring to fathom his final attitude, then comments——*

BOOTH. No heart, y'know! Great brain! If it hadn't

been for that distressing quarrel he might have saved our poor father. Don't you think so, Edward?

EDWARD. Perhaps.

HUGH. [*Giving vent to his thoughts at last with something of a relish.*] The more I think this out, the more devilishly humorous it gets. Old Booth breaking down by the grave . . Colpus reading the service . .

EDWARD. Yes, the Vicar's badly hit.

HUGH. Oh, the Pater had managed his business for years.

BOOTH. Good God . . how shall we ever look old Booth in the face again?

EDWARD. I don't worry about him; he can die quite comfortably enough on six shillings in the pound. It's one or two of the smaller fry who will suffer.

BOOTH. Now, just explain to me . . I didn't interrupt while Trenchard was talking . . of what exactly did this defrauding consist?

EDWARD. Speculating with a client's capital . . pocketing the gains, cutting the losses; meanwhile paying the client his ordinary income.

BOOTH. So that he didn't find it out?

EDWARD. Quite so.

BOOTH. In point of fact, he doesn't suffer?

EDWARD. He doesn't suffer till he finds it out.

BOOTH. And all that's wrong now is that some of their capital is missing.

EDWARD. [*Half amused, half amazed at this process of reasoning.*] Yes, that's all that's wrong.

BOOTH. What is the ah—deficit? [*The word rolls from his tongue.*]

EDWARD. Anything between two and three hundred thousand pounds.

BOOTH. [*Very impressed, and not unfavourably.*] Dear me . . this is a big affair!

HUGH. [*Following his own line of thought.*] Quite apart from the rights and wrongs of this, only a very able man could have kept a straight face to the world all these years, as Pater did.

BOOTH. I suppose he sometimes made money by these speculations.

EDWARD. Very often. His own expenditure was heavy, as you know.

BOOTH. [*With gratitude for favors received.*] He was a very generous man.

HUGH. Did nobody ever suspect him?

EDWARD. You see, Hugh, when there was any danger . . when a trust had to be wound up . . he'd make a great effort, and put the accounts straight.

BOOTH. Then he did put some accounts straight?

EDWARD. Yes, when he couldn't help himself.

BOOTH *looks very enquiring, and then squares himself up to the subject.*

BOOTH. Now look here, Edward. You told us that he told you that it was the object of his life to put these accounts straight. Then you laughed at that. Now you tell me that he did put some accounts straight.

EDWARD. [*Wearily.*] My dear Booth, you don't understand.

BOOTH. Well, let me understand . . I am anxious to understand.

EDWARD. We can't pay ten shillings in the pound.

BOOTH. That's very dreadful. But do you know that there wasn't a time when we couldn't have paid five?

EDWARD. [*Acquiescent.*] I don't know.

BOOTH. Very well, then! If what he said was true about his father and all that . . and why shouldn't we believe him if we can? . . and he did effect an improvement, that's all to his credit. Let us at least be just, Edward.

EDWARD. [*Patiently polite.*] I am very sorry to appear unjust. He has left me in a rather unfortunate position.

BOOTH. Yes, his death was a tragedy. It seems to me that if he had been spared he might have succeeded at length in this tremendous task, and restored to us our family honour.

EDWARD. Yes, Booth, he spoke very feelingly of that.

BOOTH. [*Irony lost upon him.*] I can well believe it. And I can tell you that now . . I may be right or I may be wrong . . I am feeling far less concerned about the clients' money than I am at the terrible blow to the Family which this exposure will strike. Money, after all, can to a certain extent be done without . . but Honour——

This is too much for EDWARD.

EDWARD. Our honour! Does one of you mean to give me a single penny towards undoing all the wrong that has been done?

BOOTH. I take Trenchard's word for it that that would be illegal.

EDWARD. Well . . don't talk to me of honour.

BOOTH. [*Somewhat nettled at this outburst.*] I am speaking of the public exposure. Edward, can't that be prevented?

EDWARD. [*With quick suspicion.*] How?

BOOTH. Well . . how was it being prevented before he died—before we knew anything about it?

EDWARD. [*Appealing to the spirits that watch over him.*] Oh, listen to this! First Trenchard . . and now you! You've the poison in your blood, every one of you. Who am I to talk? I daresay so have I.

BOOTH. [*Reprovingly.*] I am beginning to think that you have worked yourself into rather an hysterical state over this unhappy business.

EDWARD. [*Rating him.*] Perhaps you'd have been glad . . glad if I'd held my tongue and gone on lying and cheat-

ing . . and married and begotten a son to go on lying and cheating after me . . and to pay you your interest . . your interest in the lie and the cheat.

BOOTH. [*With statesmanlike calm.*] Look here, Edward, this rhetoric is exceedingly out of place. The simple question before us is . . What is the best course to pursue?

EDWARD. There is no question before us. There's only one course to pursue.

BOOTH. [*Crushingly.*] You will let me speak, please. In so far as our poor father was dishonest to his clients, I pray that he may be forgiven. In so far as he spent his life honestly endeavouring to right a wrong which he had found already committed . . I forgive him. I admire him, Edward. And I feel it my duty to—er—reprobate most strongly the—er—gusto with which you have been holding him up in memory to us . . ten minutes after we have stood round his grave . . as a monster of wickedness. I think I may say I knew him as well as you . . better. And . . thank God! . . there was not between him and me this —this unhappy business to warp my judgment of him. [*He warms to his subject.*] Did you ever know a more charitable man . . a larger-hearted? He was a faithful husband . . and what a father to all of us, putting us out into the world and fully intending to leave us comfortably settled there. Further . . as I see this matter, Edward . . when as a young man he was told this terrible secret, and entrusted with such a frightful task . . did he turn his back on it like a coward? No. He went through it heroically to the end of his life. And as he died I imagine there was no more torturing thought than that he had left his work unfinished. [*He is very satisfied with this peroration.*] And now if all these clients can be kept receiving their natural income, and if Father's plan could be carried out of gradually replacing the capital——

EDWARD *at this raises his head and stares with horror.*

EDWARD. You're appealing to me to carry on this . . Oh, you don't know what you're talking about!

The Major, having talked himself back to a proper eminence, remains good-tempered.

BOOTH. Well, I'm not a conceited man . . but I do think that I can understand a simple financial problem when it has been explained to me.

EDWARD. You don't know the nerve . . the unscrupulous daring it requires to——

BOOTH. Of course, if you're going to argue round your own incompetence——

EDWARD. [*Very straight.*] D'you want your legacy?

BOOTH. [*With dignity.*] In one moment I shall get very angry. Here am I doing my best to help you and your clients . . and there you sit imputing to me the most sordid motives. Do you suppose I should touch or allow to be touched the money which father has left us till every client's claim was satisfied?

EDWARD. My dear Booth, I'm sure you mean well——

BOOTH. I'll come down to your office and work with you.

At this cheerful prospect even poor EDWARD *can't help smiling.*

EDWARD. Why, you'd be found out at once.

BOOTH. [*Feeling that it is a chance lost.*] Well, of course the Pater never consulted me. I only know what I feel ought to be possible. I can but make the suggestion.

At this point TRENCHARD *looks round the door to say . .*

TRENCHARD. Are you coming, Booth?

BOOTH. Yes, certainly. I'll talk this over with Trenchard. [*As he gets up and automatically stiffens, he is reminded of the occasion, and his voice drops.*] I say . . we've been speaking very loud. You must do nothing rash. I've no doubt I can devise something which will obviate . . and then I'm sure I shall convince you . . [*Glancing into*

the hall, he apparently catches TRENCHARD'S *impatient eye, for he departs abruptly, saying . .*] All right, Trenchard, you've eight minutes.

BOOTH'S departure leaves HUGH, *at any rate, really at his ease.*

HUGH. What an experience for you, Edward!

EDWARD. [*Bitterly.*] And I feared what the shock might be to you all! Booth has made a good recovery.

HUGH. You wouldn't have him miss such a chance of booming at us all?

EDWARD. It's strange the number of people who believe you can do right by means which they know to be wrong.

HUGH. [*Taking great interest in this.*] Come, what do we know about right and wrong? Let's say legal and illegal. You're so down on the Governor because he has trespassed against the etiquette of your own profession. But now he's dead . . and if there weren't the disgrace to think of . . it's no use the rest of us pretending to feel him a criminal, because we don't. Which just shows that money . . and property——

At this point he becomes conscious that ALICE MAITLAND *is standing behind him, her eyes fixed on his brother. So he interrupts himself to ask . .*

HUGH. D'you want to speak to Edward?

ALICE. Please, Hugh.

HUGH. I'll go.

He goes, a little martyrlike, to conclude the evolution of his theory in soliloquy; his usual fate. ALICE *still looks at* EDWARD *with soft eyes, and he at her rather appealingly.*

ALICE. Auntie has told me.

EDWARD. He was fond of you. Don't think worse of him than you can help.

ALICE. I'm thinking of you.

EDWARD. I may just escape.

ALICE. So Trenchard says.

EDWARD. My hands are clean, Alice.

ALICE. [*Her voice falling lovingly.*] I know that.

EDWARD. Mother's not very upset.

ALICE. She had expected a smash in his life time.

EDWARD. I'm glad that didn't happen.

ALICE. Yes . . as the fault was his it won't hurt you so much to stand up to the blame.

EDWARD *looks puzzled at this for a moment, then gives it up.*

EDWARD. I'm hurt enough now.

ALICE. Why, what have the boys done? It was a mercy to tell Honor just at this time. She can grieve for his death and his disgrace at the same time . . and the one grief lessens the other perhaps.

EDWARD. Oh, they're all shocked enough at the disgrace . . but will they open their purses to lessen the disgrace?

ALICE. Will it seem less disgraceful to have stolen ten thousand pounds than twenty?

EDWARD. I should think so.

ALICE. I should think so, but I wonder if that's the Law. If it isn't, Trenchard wouldn't consider the point. I'm sure Public Opinion doesn't say so . . and that's what Booth is considering.

EDWARD. [*With contempt.*] Yes.

ALICE. [*Ever so gently ironical.*] Well, he's in the Army . . he's almost in Society . . and he has to get on in both; one mustn't blame him. Of course, if the money could have been given up with a flourish of trumpets . . ! But even then I doubt whether the advertisement would bring in what it cost.

EDWARD. [*Very serious.*] But when one thinks how the money was obtained!

ALICE. When one thinks how most money is obtained!

EDWARD. They've not earned it.

ALICE. [*Her eyes humorous.*] If they had, they might have given it you and earned more. Did I ever tell you what my guardian said to me when I came of age?

EDWARD. I'm thankful your money's not been in danger.

ALICE. It might have been, but I was made to look after it myself . . much against my will. My guardian was a person of great character and no principles, the best and most lovable man I've ever met . . I'm sorry you never knew him, Edward . . and he said once to me . . You've no right to your money. You've not earned it or deserved it in any way. Therefore, don't be surprised or annoyed if any enterprising person tries to get it from you. He has at least as much right to it as you have . . if he can use it better, he has more right. Shocking sentiments, aren't they? No respectable man of business could own to them. But I'm not so sorry for some of these clients as you are, Edward.

EDWARD *shakes his head, treating these paradoxes as they deserve.*

EDWARD. Alice . . one or two of them will be beggared.

ALICE. [*Sincerely.*] Yes, that is serious. What's to be done?

EDWARD. There's old nurse . . with her poor little savings gone!

ALICE. Surely those can be spared her?

EDWARD. The Law's no respecter of persons . . that's its boast. Old Booth, with more than he wants, will keep enough. My old nurse, with just enough, may starve. But it'll be a relief to clear out this nest of lies, even though one suffers one's self. I've been ashamed to walk into that office, Alice . . I'll hold my head high in prison, though.

He shakes himself stiffly erect, his chin high. ALICE *quizzes him.*

ALICE. Edward, I'm afraid you're feeling heroic.

EDWARD. I!

ALICE. Don't be so proud of your misfortune. You looked quite like Booth for the moment. [*This effectually removes the starch.*] It will be very stupid to send you to prison, and you must do your best to keep out. [*She goes on very practically.*] We were discussing if anything could be done for these one or two people who'll be beggared.

EDWARD. Yes, Alice. I'm sorry nothing can be done for them.

ALICE. It's a pity.

EDWARD. I suppose I was feeling heroic. I didn't mean to.

He has become a little like a child with her.

ALICE. That's the worst of acting on principle . . one begins thinking of one's attitude instead of the use of what one is doing.

EDWARD. I'm exposing this fraud on principle.

ALICE. Perhaps that's what's wrong.

EDWARD. Wrong!

ALICE. My dear Edward, if people are to be ruined . . !

EDWARD. What else is there to be done?

ALICE. Well . . have you thought?

EDWARD. There's nothing else to be done.

ALICE. On principle.

He looks at her; she is smiling, it is true, but smiling quite gravely. EDWARD *is puzzled. Then the yeast of her suggestion begins to work in his mind slowly, perversely at first.*

EDWARD. It had occurred to Booth . . .

ALICE. Oh, anything may occur to Booth.

EDWARD. . . In his grave concern for the family honour that I might quietly cheat the firm back into credit again.

ALICE. How stupid of Booth!

EDWARD. Well . . like my father . . Booth believes in himself.

ALICE. Yes, he's rather a credulous man.

EDWARD. [*Ignoring her little joke.*] He might have been lucky, and have done some good. I'm a weak sort of creature—just a collection of principles, as you say. Look, all I've been able to do in this business . . at the cost of my whole life perhaps . . has been to sit senselessly by my father's side and prevent things going from bad to worse.

ALICE. That was worth doing. The cost is your own affair.

She is watching him, stilly and closely. Suddenly his face lights a little, and he turns to her.

EDWARD. Alice . . there's something else I could do.

ALICE. What?

EDWARD. It's illegal.

ALICE. So much the better, perhaps. Oh, I'm lawless by birthright, being a woman.

EDWARD. I could take the money that's in my father's name, and use it only to put right the smaller accounts. It'd take a few months to do it well . . and cover the tracks. That'd be necessary.

ALICE. Then you'd give yourself up as you'd meant to do now?

EDWARD. Yes . . practically.

ALICE. It'd be worse for you then at the trial?

EDWARD. [*With a touch of another sort of pride.*] You said that was my affair.

ALICE. [*Pain in her voice and eyes.*] Oh, Edward!

EDWARD. Shall I do this?

ALICE. [*Turning away.*] Why must you ask me?

EDWARD. You mocked at my principles, didn't you? You've taken them from me. The least you can do is to give me advice in exchange.

ALICE. [*After a moment.*] No . . decide for yourself.

He jumps up, and begins to pace about, doubtful, distressed.

EDWARD. Good Lord . . it means lying and shuffling!

ALICE. [*A little trembling.*] In a good cause.

EDWARD. Ah . . but lying and shuffling takes the fine edge off one's soul.

ALICE. [*Laughing at the quaintness of her own little epigram.*] Edward, are you one of God's dandies?

EDWARD. And . . Alice, it wouldn't be easy work. It wants qualities I haven't got. I should fail.

ALICE. Would you?

He catches a look from her.

EDWARD. Well, I might not.

ALICE. And you don't need success for a lure. That's like a common man.

EDWARD. You want me to try to do this?

For answer she dares only put out her hand, and he takes it.

ALICE. Oh, my dear . . cousin!

EDWARD. [*Excitedly.*] My people will have to hold their tongues. I needn't have told them all this to-day.

ALICE. Don't tell them the rest . . they won't understand. I shall be jealous if you tell them.

EDWARD. [*Looking at her as she at him.*] Well, you've the right to be. This deed . . it's not done yet . . is your property.

ALICE. Thank you. I've always wanted to have something useful to my credit . . and I'd almost given up hoping.

Then suddenly his face changes, his voice changes, and he grips the hand he is holding so tightly as to hurt her.

EDWARD. Alice, if my father's story were true . . he must have begun like this. Trying to do the right thing in the wrong way . . then doing the wrong thing . . then bringing himself to what he was . . and so me to this. [*He flings away from her.*] No, Alice, I won't do it. I

daren't take that first step down. It's a worse risk than any failure. Think . . I might succeed.

ALICE stands very still, looking at him.

ALICE. It's a big risk. Well . . I'll take it.

He turns to her in wonder.

EDWARD. You?

ALICE. I'll risk your becoming a bad man. That's a big risk for me.

He understands, and is calmed and made happy.

EDWARD. Then there is no more to be said, is there?

ALICE. Not now. [*As she drops this gentle hint she hears something—the hall door opening.*] Here's Booth back again.

EDWARD. [*With a really mischievous grin.*] He'll be so glad he's convinced me.

ALICE. I must go back to Honor, poor girl. I wonder she has a tear left.

She leaves him briskly, brightly; leaves her cousin with his mouth set and a light in his eyes.

THE FOURTH ACT

MR. VOYSEY'S *room at the office is* EDWARD'S *now. It has somehow lost that brilliancy which the old man's occupation seemed to give it. Perhaps it is only because this December morning is dull and depressing, but the fire isn't bright, and the panels and windows don't shine as they did. There are no roses on the table, either.* EDWARD, *walking in as his father did, hanging his hat and coat where his father's used to hang, is certainly the palest shadow of that other masterful presence. A depressed, drooping shadow, too. This may be what* PEACEY *feels, if no more, for he looks very surly as he obeys the old routine of following his chief to this room on his arrival. Nor has* EDWARD *so much as a glance for his clerk. They exchange the formalest of greetings.* EDWARD *sits joylessly to his desk, on which the morning's pile of letters lies, unopened now.*

PEACEY. Good morning, sir.

EDWARD. Good morning, Peacey. Have you any notes for me?

PEACEY. Well, I've hardly been through the letters yet, sir.

EDWARD. [*His eyebrows meeting.*] Oh . . and I'm half an hour late myself this morning.

PEACEY. I'm very sorry, sir.

EDWARD. If Mr. Bullen calls, you had better show him all those papers I gave you. Write to Metcalfe as soon as

possible; say I interviewed Mr. Vickery myself this morning, and the houses will not be proceeded with. Better let me see the letter.

PEACEY. Very good, sir.

EDWARD. That's all, thank you.

PEACEY gets to the door, where he stops, looking not only surly but nervous now.

PEACEY. May I speak to you a moment, sir?

EDWARD. Certainly.

PEACEY, after a moment, makes an effort, purses his mouth, and begins.

PEACEY. Bills are beginning to come in upon me as is usual at this season, sir. My son's allowance at Cambridge is now rather a heavy item of my expenditure. I hope that the custom of the firm isn't to be neglected now that you are the head of it, Mr. Edward. Two hundred your father always made it at Christmas . . in notes, if you please.

Towards the end of this EDWARD begins to pay great attention. When he answers his voice is harsh.

EDWARD. Oh, to be sure . . your hush money.

PEACEY. [*Bridling.*] That's not a very pleasant word.

EDWARD. This is a very unpleasant subject.

PEACEY. I'm sure it isn't my wish to bring out in cold conversation what I know of the firm's position. Your father always gave me the notes in an envelope when he shook hands with me at Christmas.

EDWARD. [*Blandly.*] And I've been waiting for you to ask me.

PEACEY. Well, we'll say no more about it. There's always a bit of friction in coming to an understanding about anything, isn't there, sir?

He is going, when EDWARD'S question stops him.

EDWARD. Why didn't you speak to me about this last Christmas?

PEACEY. I knew you were upset at your father's death.

EDWARD. No, no. My father died the August before that.

PEACEY. Well . . truthfully, Mr. Edward?

EDWARD. As truthfully as you think suitable.

The irony of this is wasted on PEACEY, *who becomes pleasantly candid.*

PEACEY. Well, I couldn't make you out last Christmas. I'd always thought there must be a smash when your father died . . but it didn't come. But then again at Christmas you seemed all on edge, and I didn't know what might happen. So I thought I'd better keep quiet and say nothing.

EDWARD. I see. This little pull of yours over the firm is an inheritance from your father, isn't it?

PEACEY. [*Discreetly.*] When he retired, sir, he said to me . . I've told the Governor you know what I know. And Mr. Voysey said to me . . 'I treat you as I did your father, Peacey.' I never had another word on the subject with him.

EDWARD. A very decent arrangement. Your son's at Cambridge, you say, Peacey?

PEACEY. Yes.

EDWARD. I wonder you didn't bring him into the firm.

PEACEY. [*Taking this very kind.*] Thank you, sir . . I thought of it. But then I thought that two generations going in for this sort of thing was enough.

EDWARD. That's a matter of taste.

PEACEY. And then, sir . . I don't want to hurt your feelings, but things simply cannot go on for ever. The marvel to me is that the game has been kept up as it has. So now, if he does well at Cambridge, I hope he'll go to the bar. He has a distinct talent for patiently applying himself to the details of a thing.

EDWARD. I hope he'll do well. I'm glad to have had

this talk with you, Peacey. I'm sorry you can't have the money you want.

He returns to his letters, a little steely-eyed. PEACEY, *quite at his ease, makes for the door yet again, saying . .*

PEACEY. Oh, any time will do, sir.

EDWARD. You can't have the money at all.

PEACEY. [*Brought up short.*] Can't I?

EDWARD. [*Very decidedly indeed.*] No . . I made up my mind about that eighteen months ago. Since my father's death the trust business of the firm has not been conducted as it was formerly. We no longer make illicit profits out of our clients. There are none for you to share.

Having thus given the explanation he considers due, he goes on with his work. But PEACEY *has flushed up.*

PEACEY. Look here, Mr. Edward, I'm sorry I began this discussion. You'll give me my two hundred as usual, please, and we'll drop the subject.

EDWARD. By all means drop the subject.

PEACEY. [*His voice rising sharply.*] I want the money. I think it is not gentlemanly in you, Mr. Edward, to make these excuses to try to get out of paying it me. Your father would never have made such an excuse.

EDWARD. [*Flabbergasted.*] Do you think I'm lying to you?

PEACEY. [*With a deprecating swallow.*] I don't wish to criticise your statements or your actions at all, sir. It was no concern of mine how your father treated his clients.

EDWARD. I understand. And now it's no concern of yours how honest I am. You want your money just the same.

PEACEY. Well, don't be sarcastic . . a man does get used to a state of affairs whatever it may be.

EDWARD. [*With considerable force.*] My friend, if I drop sarcasm I shall have to tell you very candidly what I think of you.

PEACEY. That I'm a thief because I've taken money from a thief!

EDWARD. Worse than a thief. You're content that others should steal for you.

PEACEY. And who isn't?

EDWARD *is really pleased with the aptness of this. He at once changes his tone, which indeed had become rather bullying.*

EDWARD. Ah, Peacey, I perceive that you study sociology. Well, that's too big a question to enter into now. The application of the present portion of it is that I have for the moment, at some inconvenience to myself, ceased to receive stolen goods and therefore am in a position to throw a stone at you. I have thrown it.

PEACEY, *who would far sooner be bullied than talked to like this, turns very sulky.*

PEACEY. And now I'm to leave the firm, I suppose?

EDWARD. Not unless you wish.

PEACEY. I happen to think the secret's worth its price.

EDWARD. Perhaps someone will pay it you.

PEACEY. [*Feebly threatening.*] You're presuming upon its not being worth my while to make use of what I know.

EDWARD. [*Not unkindly.*] My good Peacey, it happens to be the truth I told you just now. Well, how on earth do you suppose you can successfully blackmail a man, who has so much to gain by exposure and so little to lose as I?

PEACEY. [*Peeving.*] I don't want to ruin you, sir, and I have a great regard for the firm . . but you must see that I can't have my income reduced in this way without a struggle.

EDWARD. [*With great cheerfulness.*] Very well, my friend, struggle away.

PEACEY. [*His voice rising high and thin.*] For one thing, sir, I don't think it fair dealing on your part to dock the money suddenly. I have been counting on it most of the year, and I have been led into heavy expenses. Why couldn't you have warned me?

EDWARD. That's true, Peacey, it was stupid of me. I apologise for the mistake.

PEACEY *is a little comforted by this quite candid acknowledgment.*

PEACEY. Perhaps things may be easier for you by next Christmas.

EDWARD. I hope so.

PEACEY. Then . . perhaps you won't be so particular.

At this gentle insinuation EDWARD *looks up exasperated.*

EDWARD. So you don't believe what I told you?

PEACEY. Yes, I do.

EDWARD. Then you think that the fascination of swindling one's clients will ultimately prove irresistible?

PEACEY. It's what happened to your father, I suppose you know.

This gives EDWARD *such pause that he drops his masterful tone.*

EDWARD. I didn't.

PEACEY. He got things as right as rain once.

EDWARD. Did he?

PEACEY. . . My father told me. Then he started again.

EDWARD. But how did you find that out?

PEACEY. [*Expanding pleasantly.*] Well, being so long in his service, I grew to understand your father. But when I first came into the firm, I simply hated him. He was that sour; so snappy with everyone . . as if he had a grievance against the whole world.

EDWARD. [*Pensively.*] It seems he had in those days.

PEACEY. Well, as I said, his dealings with his clients

were no business of mine. And I speak as I find. He was very kind to me . . always thoughtful and considerate. He grew to be so pleasant and generous to everyone——

EDWARD. That you have great hopes of me yet?

PEACEY. [*Who has a simple mind.*] No, Mr. Edward, no. You're different from your father . . one must make up one's mind to that. And you may believe me or not but I should be very glad to know that the firm was solvent and going straight. There have been times when I have sincerely regretted my connection with it. If you'll let me say so, I think it's very noble of you to have undertaken the work you have. [*Then, as everything seems smooth again.*] And Mr. Edward, if you'll give me enough to cover this year's extra expense I think I may promise you that I shan't expect money again.

EDWARD. [*Good-tempered, as he would speak to an importunate child.*] No, Peacey, no!

PEACEY. [*Fretful again.*] Well, sir, you make things very difficult for me.

EDWARD. Here's a letter from Mr. Cartwright which you might attend to. If he wants an appointment with me, don't make one till the New Year. His case can't come on before February.

PEACEY. [*Taking the letter.*] I am anxious to meet you in every way——[*He is handed another.*]

EDWARD. "Perceval Building Estate" . . that's yours, too.

PEACEY. [*Putting them both down resolutely.*] But I refuse to be ignored. I must consider my whole position. I hope I may not be tempted to make use of the power I possess. But if I am driven to proceed to extremities . .

EDWARD. [*Breaking in upon this bunch of tags.*] My dear Peacey, don't talk nonsense . . you couldn't proceed to an extremity to save your life. You've taken this money irresponsibly for all these years. You'll find you're no

longer capable even of such a responsible act as tripping up your neighbour.

This does completely upset the gentle blackmailer. He loses one grievance in another.

PEACEY. Really, Mr. Edward, I am a considerably older man than you, and I think that whatever our positions——

EDWARD. Don't let us argue, Peacey. You're quite at liberty to do whatever you think worth while.

PEACEY. It isn't that, sir. But these personalities——

EDWARD. Oh . . I apologise. Don't forget the letters.

PEACEY. I will not, sir.

He takes them with great dignity, and is leaving the room.

PEACEY. Here's Mr. Hugh, waiting.

EDWARD. To see me? Ask him in.

PEACEY. Come in, Mr. Hugh, please.

HUGH *comes in,* PEACEY *holding the door for him with a frigid politeness of which he is quite oblivious. At this final slight* PEACEY *goes out in dudgeon.*

EDWARD. How are you, Hugh?

HUGH. Good Lord!

And he throws himself into the chair by the fire. EDWARD, *quite used to this sort of thing, goes quietly on with his work, adding, encouragingly, after a moment . .*

EDWARD. How's Beatrice?

HUGH. She's very busy.

He studies his boots with the gloomiest expression. And indeed, they are very dirty, and his turned-up trousers are muddy at the edge. They are dark trousers, and well cut, but he wears with them a loose coat and waistcoat of a peculiar light brown check. Add to this the roughest of overcoats and a very soft hat. Add also the fact that he doesn't shave well or regularly, and that his hair wants cutting, and

HUGH'S *appearance this morning is described. As he is quite capable of sitting silently by the fire for a whole morning,* EDWARD *asks him at last . .*

EDWARD. What d'you want?

HUGH. [*With vehemence.*] I want a machine gun planted in Regent Street . . and one in the Haymarket . . and one in Leicester Square and one in the Strand . . and a dozen in the City. An earthquake would be simpler. Or why not a nice clean tidal wave? It's no good preaching and patching up any longer, Edward. We must begin afresh. Don't you feel, even in your calmer moments, that this whole country is simply hideous? The other nations must look after themselves. I'm patriotic . . I only ask that we should be destroyed.

EDWARD. It has been promised.

HUGH. I'm sick of waiting. [*Then as* EDWARD *says nothing.*] You say this is the cry just of the weak man in despair! I wouldn't be anything but a weak man in this world. I wouldn't be a king, I wouldn't be rich . . I wouldn't be a Borough Councillor . . I should be so a s h a m e d. I've walked here this morning from Hampstead. I started to curse because the streets were dirty. You'd think that an Empire could keep its streets clean! But then I saw that the children were dirty, too.

EDWARD. That's because of the streets.

HUGH. Yes, it's holiday time. Those that can cross a road safely are doing some work now . . earning some money. You'd think a governing race, grabbing responsibilities, might care for its children.

EDWARD. Come, we educate them now. And I don't think many work in holiday time.

HUGH. [*Encouraged by contradiction.*] We teach them all that we're not ashamed of . . and much that we ought to be . . and the rest they find out for themselves. Oh, every man and woman I met was muddy-eyed! They'd

joined the great conspiracy which we call our civilization. They've been educated! They believe in the Laws and the Money-market and Respectability. Well, at least they suffer for their beliefs. But I'm glad I don't make the laws . . and that I haven't any money . . and that I hate respectability . . or I should be so ashamed. By the bye, that's what I've come for.

EDWARD. [*Pleasantly.*] What? I thought you'd only come to talk.

HUGH. You must take that money of mine for your clients. Of course you ought to have had it when you asked for it. It has never belonged to me. Well . . it has never done me any good. I have never made any use of it, and so it has been just a clog to my life.

EDWARD. [*Surprised.*] My dear Hugh . . this is very generous of you.

HUGH. Not a bit. I only want to start fresh and free.

EDWARD. [*Sitting back from his work.*] Hugh, do you really think that money has carried a curse with it?

HUGH. [*With great violence.*] Think! I'm the proof of it, and look at me. When I said I'd be an artist the Governor gave me a hundred and fifty a year . . the rent of a studio and the price of a velvet coat he thought it; that was all he knew about Art. Then my respectable training got me engaged and married. Marriage in a studio puzzled the Governor, so he guessed it at *two* hundred and fifty a year . . and looked for lay figure-babies, I suppose. What had I to do with Art? Nothing I've done yet but reflects our drawing-room at Chislehurst.

EDWARD. [*Considering.*] Yes . . What do you earn in a year? I doubt if you can afford to give this up.

HUGH. Oh, Edward . . you clank the chain with the best of them. That word Afford! I want to be free from my advantages. Don't you see I must find out what I'm

worth in m y s e l f . . whether I even exist or not? Perhaps I'm only a pretence of a man animated by an income.

EDWARD. But you can't return to nature on the London pavements.

HUGH. No. Nor in England at all . . it's nothing but a big back garden. [*Now he collects himself for a final outburst.*] But if there's no place on this earth where a man can prove his right to live by some other means than robbing his neighbour . . I'd better go and request the next horse I meet to ride me . . to the nearest lunatic asylum.

EDWARD *waits till the effects of this explosion are over.*

EDWARD. And what does Beatrice say to your emigrating to the backwoods . . if that is exactly what you mean?

HUGH. Now that we're separating——

EDWARD. [*Taken aback.*] What?

HUGH. We mean to separate.

EDWARD. This is the first I've heard of it.

HUGH. Beatrice is making some money by her books, so it has become possible.

EDWARD. [*Humorously.*] Have you told anyone yet?

HUGH. We mean to now. I think a thing comes to pass quicker in public.

EDWARD. Say nothing at home until after Christmas.

HUGH. Oh, Lord, I forgot! They'll discuss it solemnly. [*Then he whistles.*] Emily knows!

EDWARD. [*Having considered.*] I shan't accept this money from you . . there's no need. All the good has been done that I wanted to do. No one will be beggared now. So why should you be?

HUGH. [*With clumsy affection.*] We've taken a fine lot of interest in your labours, haven't we, Hercules?

EDWARD. You hold your tongue about the office affairs, don't you? It's not safe.

HUGH. When will you be quit of the beastly business?

EDWARD. [*Becoming reserved and cold at once.*] I'm in no hurry.

HUGH. What do you gain by hanging on now?

EDWARD. Occupation.

HUGH. But, Edward, it must be an awfully wearying state of things. I suppose any moment a policeman may knock at the door . . so to speak?

EDWARD. [*Appreciating the figure of speech.*] Any moment. I take no precautions. I suppose that's why he doesn't come. At first I listened for him, day by day. Then I said to myself . . next week. But a year has gone by and more. I've ceased expecting to hear the knock at all.

HUGH. But look here . . is all this worth while?

EDWARD. [*Supremely ironical.*] My dear Hugh, what a silly question!

HUGH. [*Very seriously.*] But have you the right to make a mean thing of your life like this?

EDWARD. Does my life matter?

HUGH. Well . . of course!

EDWARD. I find no evidence to convince me of it. The World that you talk about so finely is using me up. A little wantonly . . a little needlessly, I do think. But she knows her own damn business . . or so she says, if you try to teach it her. And why should I trouble to fit myself for better work than she has given me to do . . nursing fools' money?

HUGH. [*Responding at once to this vein.*] Edward, we must turn this world upside down. It's her stupidity that drives me mad. We all want a lesson in values. We're never taught what is worth having and what isn't. Why should your r e a l happiness be sacrificed to the s h a m happiness which people have invested in the firm?

EDWARD. I suppose their money means such happiness to them as they understand.

HUGH. Then we want another currency. We must learn to express ourselves in terms of vitality. There can be no other standard of worth in life, can there? I never believed that money was valuable. I remember once giving a crossing sweeper a sovereign. The sovereign was nothing. But the sensation I gave him was an intrinsically valuable thing.

He is fearfully pleased with his essay in philosophy.

EDWARD. He could buy other sensations with the sovereign.

HUGH. But none like the first. [*Then the realities of life overwhelm him again.*] And yet . . we're slaves! Beatrice won't let me go until we're each certain of two hundred a year. And she's quite right . . I should only get into debt. You know that two fifty a year of mine is a hundred and eighty now.

EDWARD. [*Mischievous.*] Why would you invest sensationally?

HUGH. [*With great seriousness.*] I put money into things which I know ought to succeed . .

The telephone rings. EDWARD *speaks through it.*

EDWARD. Certainly . . bring him in. [*Then to his brother, who sits on the table idly disarranging everything.*] You'll have to go now, Hugh.

HUGH. [*Shaking his head gloomily.*] You're one of the few people I can talk to, Edward.

EDWARD. I like listening.

HUGH. [*As much cheered as surprised.*] Do you! I suppose I talk a lot of rot . . but . .

In comes old MR. GEORGE BOOTH, *older too in looks than he was eighteen months back. Very dandyishly dressed, he still seems by no means so happy as his clothes might be making him.*

MR. BOOTH. 'Ullo, Hugh! I thought I should find you, Edward.

EDWARD. [*Formally.*] Good morning, Mr. Booth.

HUGH. [*As he collects his hat, his coat, his various properties.*] Well . . Beatrice and I go down to Chislehurst to-morrow. I say . . d'you know that old Nursie is furious with you about something?

EDWARD. [*Shortly.*] Yes, I know. Good-bye.

HUGH. How are you?

He launches this enquiry at MR. BOOTH *with great suddenness just as he leaves the room. The old gentleman jumps; then jumps again at the slam of the door. And then he frowns at* EDWARD *in a frightened sort of way.*

EDWARD. Will you come here . . or will you sit by the fire?

MR. BOOTH. This'll do. I shan't detain you long.

He take the chair by the table and occupies the next minute or two carefully disposing of his hat and gloves.

EDWARD. Are you feeling all right again?

MR. BOOTH. A bit dyspeptic. How are you?

EDWARD. Quite well, thanks.

MR. BOOTH. I'm glad . . I'm glad. [*He now proceeds to cough a little, hesitating painfully.*] I'm afraid this isn't very pleasant business I've come upon.

EDWARD. D'you want to go to Law with anyone?

MR. BOOTH. No . . oh, no. I'm getting too old to quarrel.

EDWARD. A pleasant symptom.

MR. BOOTH. [*With a final effort.*] I mean to withdraw my securities from the custody of your firm . . [*and he adds apologetically*] with the usual notice, of course.

It would be difficult to describe what EDWARD *feels at this moment. Perhaps something of the shock that the relief of death may be as an end to pain so*

long endured that it has been half forgotten. He answers very quietly, without a sign of emotion.

EDWARD. Thank you . . May one ask why?

MR. BOOTH. [*Relieved that the worst is over.*] Certainly . . certainly. My reason is straightforward and simple and well considered. I think you must know, Edward, I have never been able to feel that implicit confidence in your ability which I had in your father's. Well, it is hardly to be expected, is it?

EDWARD. [*With a grim smile.*] No.

MR. BOOTH. I can say that without unduly depreciating you. Men like your father are few and far between. As far as I know, things proceed at this office as they have always done, but . . since his death I have not been happy about my affairs.

EDWARD. [*Speaking as it is his duty to.*] I think you need be under no apprehension . .

MR. BOOTH. I daresay not. But that isn't the point. Now, for the first time in my long life, I am worried about money affairs; and I don't like the feeling. The possession of money has always been a pleasure to me . . and for what are perhaps my last years I don't wish that to be otherwise. You must remember you have practically my entire property unreservedly in your control.

EDWARD. Perhaps we can arrange to hand you over the reins to an extent which will ease your mind, and at the same time not . .

MR. BOOTH. I thought of that. Believe me, I have every wish not to slight unduly your father's son. I have not moved in the matter for eighteen months. I have not been able to make up my mind to. Really, one feels a little helpless . . and the transaction of business requires more energy than . . But I saw my doctor yesterday, Edward, and he told me . . well, it was a warning. And so I felt it my duty at once to . . especially as I made up my mind to it

some time ago. [*He comes to the end of this havering at last, and adds.*] In point of fact, Edward, more than a year before your father died I had quite decided that my affairs could never be with you as they were with him.

EDWARD *starts almost out of his chair, his face pale, his eyes black.*

EDWARD. Did h e know that?

MR. BOOTH. [*Resenting this new attitude.*] I think I never said it in so many words. But he may easily have guessed.

EDWARD. [*As he relaxes, and turns, almost shuddering, from the possibility of dreadful knowledge.*] No . . no . . he never guessed. [*Then with a sudden fresh impulse.*] I hope you won't do this, Mr. Booth.

MR. BOOTH. I have quite made up my mind.

EDWARD. You must let me persuade you——

MR. BOOTH. [*Conciliatory.*] I shall make a point of informing your family that you are in no way to blame in the matter. And in the event of any personal legal difficulties I shall always be delighted to come to you. My idea is for the future to employ merely a financial agent——

EDWARD. [*Still quite unstrung really, and his nerves betraying him.*] If you had made up your mind before my father died to do this, you ought to have told h i m.

MR. BOOTH. Please allow me to know my own business best. I did not choose to distress him by——

EDWARD. [*Pulling himself together: speaking half to himself.*] Well . . well . . this is one way out. And it's not my fault.

MR. BOOTH. You're making a fearful fuss about a very simple matter, Edward. The loss of one client, however important he may be . . Why, this is one of the best family practices in London. I am surprised at your lack of dignity.

EDWARD *yields smilingly to this assertiveness.*

EDWARD. True . . I have no dignity. Will you walk off with your papers now?

MR. BOOTH. What notice is usual?

EDWARD. To a good solicitor, five minutes. Ten to a poor one.

MR. BOOTH. You'll have to explain matters a bit to me.

Now EDWARD *settles to his desk again; really with a certain grim enjoyment of the prospect.*

EDWARD. Yes, I had better. Well, Mr. Booth, how much do you think you're worth?

MR. BOOTH. [*Easily.*] I couldn't say off hand.

EDWARD. But you've a rough idea?

MR. BOOTH. To be sure.

EDWARD. You'll get not quite half that out of us.

MR. BOOTH. [*Precisely.*] I think I said I had made up my mind to withdraw the whole amount.

EDWARD. You should have made up your mind sooner.

MR. BOOTH. I don't in the least understand you, Edward.

EDWARD. A great part of your capital doesn't exist.

MR. BOOTH. [*With some irritation.*] Nonsense! It must exist. [*He scans* EDWARD'S *set face in vain.*] You mean that it won't be prudent to realise? You can hand over the securities. I don't want to reinvest simply because——

EDWARD. I can't hand over what I haven't got.

This sentence falls on the old man's ears like a knell.

MR. BOOTH. Is anything . . w r o n g?

EDWARD. [*Grim and patient.*] How many more times am I to say that we have robbed you of nearly half your property?

MR. BOOTH. [*His senses failing him.*] Say that again.

EDWARD. It's quite true.

MR. BOOTH. My money . . g o n e?

EDWARD. Yes.

MR. BOOTH. [*Clutching at a straw of anger.*] You've been the thief . . you . . you . . ?

EDWARD. I wouldn't tell you if I could help it . . my father.

That actually calls the old man back to something like dignity and self-possession. He thumps on EDWARD'S *table furiously.*

MR. BOOTH. I'll make you prove that.

And now EDWARD *buries his face in his arms and just goes off into hysterics.*

EDWARD. Oh, you've fired a mine!

MR. BOOTH. [*Scolding him well.*] Slandering your dead father . . and lying to me, revenging yourself by frightening me . . because I detest you.

EDWARD. Why . . haven't I thanked you for putting an end to all my troubles? I do . . I promise you I do.

MR. BOOTH. [*Shouting, and his sudden courage failing as he shouts.*] Prove this . . prove it to me! I'm not to be frightened so easily. One can't lose half of all one has and then be told of it in two minutes . . sitting at a table. [*His voice falls off to a piteous whimper.*]

EDWARD. [*Quietly now, and kindly.*] If my father had told you this in plain words you'd have believed him.

MR. BOOTH. [*Bowing his head.*] Yes.

EDWARD *looks at the poor old thing with great pity.*

EDWARD. What on earth did you want to withdraw your account for? You need never have known . . you could have died happy. Settling with all those charities in your will would certainly have smashed us up. But proving your will is many years off yet, we'll hope.

MR. BOOTH. [*Pathetic and bewildered.*] I don't understand. No, I don't understand . . because your father . . But I must understand, Edward.

EDWARD. Don't shock yourself trying to understand my father, for you never will. Pull yourself together, Mr. Booth. After all, this isn't a vital matter to you. It's

not even as if you had a family to consider . . like some of the others.

MR. BOOTH. [*Vaguely.*] What others?

EDWARD. Don't imagine your money has been specially selected for pilfering.

MR. BOOTH. [*With solemn incredulity.*] One has read of this sort of thing, but . . I thought people always got found out.

EDWARD. [*Brutally humorous.*] Well . . we are found out. You've found us out.

MR. BOOTH. [*Rising to the full appreciation of his wrongs.*] Oh . . I've been foully cheated!

EDWARD. [*Patiently.*] I've told you so.

MR. BOOTH. [*His voice breaks, he appeals pitifully.*] But by you, Edward . . say it's by you.

EDWARD. [*Unable to resist his quiet revenge.*] I've not the ability or the personality for such work, Mr. Booth . . nothing but principles, which forbid me even to lie to you.

The old gentleman draws a long breath, and then speaks with great awe, blending into grief.

MR. BOOTH. I think your father is in Hell . . I'd have gone there myself to save him from it. I loved him very truly. How he could have had the heart! We were friends for nearly fifty years. Am I to think now he only cared for me to cheat me?

EDWARD. [*Venturing the comfort of an explanation.*] No . . he didn't value money as you do.

MR. BOOTH. [*With sudden shrill logic.*] But he took it. What d'you mean by that?

EDWARD *leans back in his chair and changes the tenor of their talk.*

EDWARD. Well, you're master of the situation now. What are you going to do?

MR. BOOTH. To get my money back.

EDWARD. No, that's gone.

MR. BOOTH. Then give me what's left, and——

EDWARD. Are you going to prosecute?

MR. BOOTH. [*Shifting uneasily in his chair.*] Oh, dear . . is that necessary? Can't somebody else do that? I thought the Law——

EDWARD. You need not prosecute, you know.

MR. BOOTH. What'll happen if I don't?

EDWARD. What do you suppose I'm doing here now?

MR. BOOTH. [*As if he were being asked a riddle.*] I don't know.

EDWARD. [*Earnestly.*] I'm trying to straighten things a little. I'm trying to undo what my father did . . to do again what he undid. It's a poor, dull sort of work now . . throwing penny after penny, hardly earned, into the pit of our deficit. But I've been doing that for what it's worth, in the time that was left to me . . till this should happen. I never thought you'd bring it to pass. I can continue to do that, if you choose . . until the next smash comes. I'm pleased to call this my duty. [*He searches* MR. BOOTH'S *face, and finds there only disbelief and fear. He bursts out.*] Oh, why won't you believe me? It can't hurt you to believe it.

MR. BOOTH. You must admit, Edward, it isn't easy to believe anything in this office . . just for the moment.

EDWARD. [*Bowing to the extreme reasonableness of this.*] I suppose not. I can prove it to you. I'll take you through the books . . you won't understand them . . but I could prove it.

MR. BOOTH. I think I'd rather not. D'you think I ought to hold any further communication with you at all? [*And at this he takes his hat.*]

EDWARD. [*With a little explosion of contemptuous anger.*] Certainly not. Prosecute . . prosecute!

MR. BOOTH. [*With dignity.*] Don't lose your temper. You know it's my place to be angry with you.

EDWARD. I beg your pardon. [*Then he is elaborately explanatory.*] I shall be g r a t e f u l if you'll prosecute.

MR. BOOTH. [*More puzzled than ever.*] There's something in this which I don't understand.

EDWARD. [*With deliberate unconcern.*] Think it over.

MR. BOOTH. [*Hesitating, fidgetting.*] But surely I oughtn't to have to make up my mind! There must be a right or wrong thing to do. Edward, can't y o u tell me?

EDWARD. I'm prejudiced.

MR. BOOTH. [*Angrily.*] What do you mean by placing me in a dilemma? I believe you're simply trying to practise upon my goodness of heart. Certainly I ought to prosecute at once . . Oughtn't I? [*Then at the nadir of helplessness.*] Can't I consult another solicitor?

EDWARD. [*His chin in the air.*] Write to the Times about it!

MR. BOOTH. [*Shocked and grieved at his attitude.*] Edward, how can you be so cool and heartless?

EDWARD. [*Changing his tone.*] D'you think I shan't be glad to sleep at nights?

MR. BOOTH. Perhaps you'll be put in prison?

EDWARD. I a m in prison . . a less pleasant one than Wormwood Scrubbs. But we're all prisoners, Mr. Booth.

MR. BOOTH. [*Wagging his head.*] Yes, this is what comes of your philosophy. Why aren't you on your knees?

EDWARD. To you?

This was not what MR. BOOTH *meant, but as he gets up from his chair he feels all but mighty.*

MR. BOOTH. And why should you expect me to shrink from vindicating the law?

EDWARD. [*Shortly.*] I don't. I've explained you'll be doing me a kindness. When I'm wanted you'll find me here at my desk. [*Then as an afterthought.*] If you take long to decide . . don't alter your behaviour to my family

in the meantime. They know the main points of the business, and——

MR. BOOTH. [*Knocked right off his balance.*] Do they? Good God! . . I'm invited to dinner the day after tomorrow . . that's Christmas Eve. The hypocrites!

EDWARD. [*Unmoved.*] I shall be there . . that will have given you two days. Will you tell me then?

MR. BOOTH. [*Protesting violently.*] I can't go to dinner . . I can't eat with them! I must be ill!

EDWARD. [*With a half smile.*] I remember I went tc dinner at Chislehurst to tell my father of my decision.

MR. BOOTH. [*Testily.*] What decision?

EDWARD. To remain in the firm when I first knew of the difficulties.

MR. BOOTH. [*Interested.*] Was I present?

EDWARD. I daresay.

MR. BOOTH *stands there, hat, stick and gloves in hand, shaken by his experience, helpless, at his wits' end. He falls into a sort of fretful reverie, speaking half to himself, but yet as if he hoped that* EDWARD, *who is wrapped in his own thoughts, would have the decency to answer, or at least listen, to what he is saying.*

MR. BOOTH. Yes, how often I dined with him! Oh, it was monstrous! [*His eyes fall on the clock.*] It's nearly lunch time now. Do you know, I still can hardly believe all this? I wish I hadn't found it out. If he hadn't died I should never have found it out. I hate to have to be vindictive . . it's not my nature. Indeed, I'm sure I'm more grieved than angry. But it isn't as if it were a small sum. And I don't see that one is called upon to forgive crimes . . or why does the Law exist? I feel that this will go near to killing me. I'm too old to have such troubles . . it isn't right. And now if I have to prosecute——

EDWARD. [*At last throwing in a word.*] You need not.

MR. BOOTH. [*Thankful for the provocation.*] Don't you attempt to influence me, sir!

He turns to go.

EDWARD. With the money you have left . . .

EDWARD *follows him politely.* MR. BOOTH *flings the door open.*

MR. BOOTH. Make out a cheque for that at once and send it me.

EDWARD. You could . . .

MR. BOOTH. [*Clapping his hat on, stamping his stick.*] I shall do the right thing, sir, never fear.

So he marches off in fine style, having, he thinks, had the last word and all. But EDWARD, *closing the door after him, mutters . .*

EDWARD. . . Save your soul! . . I'm afraid I was going to say.

THE FIFTH ACT

Naturally, it is the dining-room—consecrated as it is to the distinguishing orgie of the season—which bears the brunt of what an English household knows as Christmas decorations. They consist chiefly of the branches of holly (that unyielding tree), stuck cock-eyed behind the top edges of the pictures. The one picture conspicuously not decorated is that which now hangs over the fireplace, a portrait of MR. VOYSEY, *with its new gilt frame and its brass plate marking it also as a presentation.* HONOR, *hastily, and at some bodily peril, pulled down the large bunch of mistletoe which a callous housemaid had suspended above it, in time to obviate the shock to family feelings which such impropriety would cause. Otherwise the only difference between the dining-room's appearance at half past nine on Christmas eve and on any other evening in the year is that little piles of queer-shaped envelopes seem to be lying about, while there is quite a lot of tissue paper and string to be seen peeping from odd corners. The electric light is reduced to one bulb, but when the maid opens the door, showing in* MR. GEORGE BOOTH, *she switches on the rest.*

PHŒBE. This room is empty, sir. I'll tell Mr. Edward. *She leaves him to fidget towards the fireplace and back, not removing his comforter or his coat, scarcely turning down the collar, screwing his cap in his*

hands. In a very short time EDWARD *comes in, shutting the door, and taking stock of the visitor before he speaks.*

EDWARD. Well?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Feebly.*] I hope my excuse for not coming to dinner was acceptable. I did have . . I have a very bad headache.

EDWARD. I daresay they believed it.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. I have come immediately to tell you of my decision . . perhaps this trouble will then be a little more off my mind.

EDWARD. What is it?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. I couldn't think the matter out alone. I went this afternoon to talk it all over with my old friend Colpus. [*At this news* EDWARD'S *eyebrows contract and then rise.*] What a terrible shock to him!

EDWARD. Oh, nearly three of his four thousand pounds are quite safe.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. That you and your father . . you, whom he baptised . . should have robbed him! I never saw a man so utterly prostrate with grief. That it should have been your father! And his poor wife! . . though she never got on with your father.

EDWARD. [*With cheerful irony.*] Oh, Mrs. Colpus knows, too, does she?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Of course he told Mrs. Colpus. This is an unfortunate time for the storm to break on him. What with Christmas Day and Sunday following so close, they're as busy as can be. He has resolved that during this season of peace and goodwill he must put the matter from him if he can. But once Christmas is over . . ! [*He envisages the Christian old Vicar giving* EDWARD *a hell of a time then.*]

EDWARD. [*Coolly.*] So I conclude you mean to prosecute. For if you don't, you've given the Colpuses a lot of

unnecessary pain . . and inflicted a certain amount of loss by telling them.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Naïvely.*] I never thought of that. No, Edward, I have decided not to prosecute.

EDWARD *hides his face for a moment.*

EDWARD. And I've been hoping to escape! Well . . it can't be helped. [*And he sets his teeth.*]

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*With touching solemnity.*] I think I could not bear to see the family I have loved brought to such disgrace.

EDWARD. So you'll compound my felony?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*A little nervous.*] That's only your joke!

EDWARD. You'll come to no harm.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. On the contrary. And I want to ask your pardon, Edward, for some of the hard thoughts I have had of you. I consider this effort of yours to restore to the firm the credit which your father lost a very striking one. What improvements have you effected so far?

EDWARD. [*Wondering what is coming now.*] I took the money that my father left . .

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. And I suppose you take the ordinary profits of the firm?

EDWARD. Yes. It costs me very little to live.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Do you restore to the clients all round, in proportion to the amount they have lost?

EDWARD. [*Cautiously.*] That's the law.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. D'you think that's quite fair?

EDWARD. No, I don't.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. No, I consider the treachery to have been blacker in some cases than in others.

EDWARD. [*His face brightening a little.*] Are you going to help me in this work of mine?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Surely, by consenting not to prosecute I am doing so.

EDWARD. Will you do no more?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Well, as far as my own money is concerned, this is my proposal. [*He coughs, and proceeds very formally.*] Considering how absolutely I trusted your father, and believed in him, I think you should at once return me the balance of my capital that there is left.

EDWARD. [*Cold again.*] That is being done.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Good. That you should continue to pay me a fair interest upon the rest of that capital, which ought to exist and does not. And that you should, year by year, pay me back by degrees out of the earnings of the firm as much of that capital as you can afford. We will agree upon the sum . . say a thousand a year. I doubt if you can ever restore me all that I have lost, but do your best, and I shan't complain. There . . I think that is fair dealing!

EDWARD *does not take his eyes off* MR. BOOTH *until the whole meaning of this proposition has settled in his brain. Then, without warning, he goes off into peals of laughter, much to the alarm of* MR. BOOTH, *who has never thought him over-sane.*

EDWARD. How funny! How very funny!

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Edward, don't laugh.

EDWARD. I never heard anything quite so funny!

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Edward, stop laughing!

EDWARD. What will Colpus . . what will all the other Christian gentlemen demand? Pounds of flesh! Pounds of flesh!

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Don't be hysterical. I demand what is mine . . in such quantities as you can afford.

EDWARD'S *laughter gives way to the deepest anger of which he is capable.*

EDWARD. I'm giving my soul and body to restoring you and the rest of you to your precious money bags . . and you'll wring me dry. Won't you? Won't you?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Now be reasonable. Argue the point quietly.

EDWARD. Go to the devil, sir!

And with that he turns away from the flabbergasted old gentleman.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Don't be rude.

EDWARD. [*His anger vanishing.*] I beg your pardon.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. You're excited. Take time to think of it. I'm reasonable.

EDWARD. [*His sense of humour returning.*] Most! Most! [*There is a knock at the door.*] Come in! Come in!

HONOR *intrudes an apologetic head.*

HONOR. Am I interrupting business? I'm so sorry.

EDWARD. [*Crowing in a mirthless enjoyment of his joke.*] No! Business is over . . quite over. Come in, Honor.

HONOR *puts on the table a market basket bulging with little paper parcels, and, oblivious to* MR. BOOTH'S *distracted face, tries to fix his attention.*

HONOR. I thought, dear Mr. Booth, perhaps you wouldn't mind carrying round this basket of things yourself. It's so very damp underfoot that I don't want to send one of the maids out to-night if I can possibly avoid it . . and if one doesn't get Christmas presents the very first thing on Christmas morning quite half the pleasure in them is lost, don't you think?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Yes . . yes.

HONOR. [*Fishing out the parcels one by one.*] This is a bell for Mrs. Williams . . something she said she wanted so that you can ring that for her, which saves the maids. Cap and apron for Mary. Cap and apron for Ellen. Shawl for Davis, when she goes out to the larder. All useful presents. And that's something for you, but you're not to look at it till the morning.

Having shaken each of these at the old gentleman, she proceeds to re-pack them. He is now trembling

with anxiety to escape before any more of the family find him there.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Thank you . . thank you! I hope my lot has arrived. I left instructions . .

HONOR. Quite safely . . and I have hidden them. Presents are put on the breakfast table to-morrow.

EDWARD. [*With an inconsequence that still further alarms* MR. BOOTH.] When we were all children our Christmas breakfast was mostly made off chocolates.

Before the basket is packed, MRS. VOYSEY *sails slowly into the room, as smiling and as deaf as ever.* MR. BOOTH *does his best not to scowl at her.*

MRS. VOYSEY. Are you feeling better, George Booth?

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. No. [*Then he elevates his voice, with a show of politeness.*] No, thank you . . I can't say I am.

MRS. VOYSEY. You don't look better.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. I still have my headache. [*With a distracted shout.*] Headache.

MRS. VOYSEY. Bilious, perhaps! I quite understand you didn't care to dine. But why not have taken your coat off? How foolish, in this warm room!

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. Thank you. I'm just going.

He seizes the market basket. At that moment MRS. HUGH *appears.*

BEATRICE. Your shawl, mother. [*And she clasps it round* MRS. VOYSEY'S *shoulders.*]

MRS. VOYSEY. Thank you, Beatrice. I thought I had it on. [*Then to* MR. BOOTH, *who is now entangled in his comforter.*] A merry Christmas to you.

BEATRICE. Good evening, Mr. Booth.

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. I beg your pardon. Good evening, Mrs. Hugh.

HONOR. [*With sudden inspiration, to the company in*

general.] Why shouldn't I write in here . . now the table's cleared!

MR. GEORGE BOOTH. [*Sternly, now he is safe by the door.*] Will you see me out, Edward?

EDWARD. Yes.

He follows the old man and his basket, leaving the others to distribute themselves about the room. It is a custom of the female members of the VOYSEY *family, especially about Christmas time, to return to the dining-room, when the table has been cleared, and occupy themselves in various ways which require space and untidiness. Sometimes, as the evening wears on, they partake of cocoa, sometimes they abstain.* BEATRICE *has a little work-basket, containing a buttonless glove and such things, which she is rectifying.* HONOR'S *writing is done with the aid of an enormous blotting book, which bulges with apparently a year's correspondence. She sheds its contents upon the end of the dining table and spreads them abroad.* MRS. VOYSEY *settles to the fire, opens the Nineteenth Century, and is instantly absorbed in it.*

BEATRICE. Where's Emily?

HONOR. [*Mysteriously.*] Well, Beatrice, she's in the library, talking to Booth.

BEATRICE. Talking to her husband; good Heavens! I know she has taken my scissors.

HONOR. I think she's telling him about you.

BEATRICE. What about me?

HONOR. You and Hugh.

BEATRICE. [*With a little movement of annoyance.*] I suppose this is Hugh's fault. It was carefully arranged no one was to be told till after Christmas.

HONOR. Emily told me . . and Edward knows . . and Mother knows . .

BEATRICE. I warned Mother a year ago.

HONOR. Everyone seems to know but Booth . . so I thought he'd better be told. I suggested one night so that he might have time to think over it . . but Emily said that'd wake Alfred. Besides, she's nearly always asleep herself when he comes to bed.

BEATRICE. Why do they still have that baby in their room?

HONOR. Emily considers it her duty.

At this moment EMILY *comes in, looking rather trodden upon.* HONOR *concludes in the most audible of whispers . .*

HONOR. Don't say anything . . it's my fault.

BEATRICE. [*Fixing her with a severe forefinger.*] Emily . . have you taken my best scissors?

EMILY. [*Timidly.*] No, Beatrice.

HONOR. [*Who is diving into the recesses of the blotting book.*] Oh, here they are! I must have taken them. I do apologise!

EMILY. [*More timidly still.*] I'm afraid Booth's rather cross . . he's gone to look for Hugh.

BEATRICE. [*With a shake of her head.*] Honor . . I've a good mind to make you sew on these buttons for me.

In comes the Major, strepitant. He takes, so to speak, just time enough to train himself on BEATRICE, *and then fires.*

BOOTH. Beatrice, what on earth is this Emily has been telling me?

BEATRICE. [*With elaborate calm.*] Emily, what have you been telling Booth?

BOOTH. Please . . please do not prevaricate. Where is Hugh?

MRS. VOYSEY. [*Looking over her spectacles.*] What did you say, Booth?

BOOTH. I want Hugh, Mother.

MRS. VOYSEY. I thought you were playing billiards together.

EDWARD *strolls back from despatching* MR. BOOTH, *his face thoughtful.*

BOOTH. [*Insistently.*] Edward, where is Hugh?

EDWARD. [*With complete indifference.*] I don't know.

BOOTH. [*In trumpet tones.*] Honor, will you oblige me by finding Hugh, and saying I wish to speak to him, here, immediately?

HONOR, *who has leapt at the sound of her name, flies from the room without a word.*

BEATRICE. I know quite well what you want to talk about, Booth. Discuss the matter by all means, if it amuses you . . but don't shout.

BOOTH. I use the voice Nature has gifted me with, Beatrice.

BEATRICE. [*As she searches for a glove button.*] Certainly Nature did let herself go over your lungs.

BOOTH. [*Glaring round with indignation.*] This is a family matter, otherwise I should not feel it my duty to interfere . . as I do. Any member of the family has a right to express an opinion. I want Mother's. Mother, what do you think?

MRS. VOYSEY. [*Amicably.*] What about?

BOOTH. Hugh and Beatrice separating.

MRS. VOYSEY. They haven't separated.

BOOTH. But they mean to.

MRS. VOYSEY. Fiddle-de-dee!

BOOTH. I quite agree with you.

BEATRICE. [*With a charming smile.*] This reasoning would convert a stone.

BOOTH. Why have I not been told?

BEATRICE. You have just been told.

BOOTH. [*Thunderously.*] Before.

BEATRICE. The truth is, dear Booth, we're all so afraid of you.

BOOTH. [*A little mollified.*] Ha . . I should be glad to think that.

BEATRICE. [*Sweetly.*] Don't you?

BOOTH. [*Intensely serious.*] Beatrice, your callousness shocks me! That you can dream of deserting Hugh . . a man of all others who requires constant care and attention.

BEATRICE. May I remark that the separation is as much Hugh's wish as mine?

BOOTH. I don't believe that.

BEATRICE. [*Her eyebrows up.*] Really!

BOOTH. I don't imply that you're lying. But you must know that it's Hugh's nature to wish to do anything that he thinks anybody wishes him to do. All my life I've had to stand up for him . . and, by Jove, I'll continue to do so.

EDWARD. [*From the depths of his armchair.*] If you'd taught him to stand up for himself——

The door is flung almost off its hinges by HUGH, *who then stands stamping, and pale green with rage.*

HUGH. Look here, Booth . . I will not have you interfering with my private affairs. Is one never to be free from your bullying?

BOOTH. You ought to be grateful.

HUGH. Well, I'm not.

BOOTH. This is a family affair.

HUGH. It is not!

BOOTH. [*At the top of his voice.*] If all you can do is to contradict me, you'd better listen to what I've got to say . . quietly.

HUGH, *quite shouted down, flings himself petulantly into a chair. A hush falls.*

EMILY. [*In a still small voice.*] Would you like me to go, Booth?

BOOTH. [*Severely.*] No, Emily. Unless anything has

been going on which cannot be discussed before you . . [*Then more severely still.*] And I hope that is not so.

HUGH. [*Muttering rebelliously.*] Oh, you have the mind of a . . cheap schoolmaster!

BOOTH. Why do you wish to separate?

HUGH. What's the use of telling you? You won't understand.

BEATRICE. [*Who sews on, undisturbed.*] We don't get on well together.

BOOTH. [*Amazedly.*] Is that all?

HUGH. [*Snapping at him.*] Yes, that's all. Can you find a better reason?

BOOTH. [*With brotherly contempt.*] I have given up expecting common sense from you. But Beatrice—! [*His tone implores her to be reasonable.*]

BEATRICE. It doesn't seem to me any sort of sense that people should live together for purposes of mutual irritation.

BOOTH. [*Protesting.*] My dear girl! . . that sounds like a quotation from your last book.

BEATRICE. It isn't. I do think, Booth, you might read that book . . for the honour of the Family.

BOOTH. [*Successfully side-tracked . .*] I have bought it, Beatrice, and——

BEATRICE. That's the principal thing, of course——

BOOTH. [. . *and discovering it.*] But do let us keep to the subject.

BEATRICE. [*With flattering sincerity.*] Certainly, Booth. And there is hardly any subject that I wouldn't ask your advice about. But upon this . . do let me know better. Hugh and I will be happier apart.

BOOTH. [*Obstinately.*] Why?

BEATRICE. [*With resolute patience, having vented a little sigh.*] Hugh finds that my opinions distress him. And I have at last lost patience with Hugh.

MRS. VOYSEY. [*Who has been trying to follow this through her spectacles.*] What does Beatrice say?

BOOTH. [*Translating into a loud sing-song.*] That she wishes to leave her husband because she has lost patience!

MRS. VOYSEY. [*With considerable acrimony.*] Then you must be a very ill-tempered woman. Hugh has a sweet nature.

HUGH. [*Shouting self-consciously.*] Nonsense, mother!

BEATRICE. [*Shouting good-humouredly.*] I quite agree with you, mother. [*She continues to her husband in an even just tone.*] You have a sweet nature, Hugh, and it is most difficult to get angry with you. I have been seven years working up to it. But now that I am angry, I shall never get pleased again.

The Major returns to his subject, refreshed by a moment's repose.

BOOTH. How has he failed in his duty? Tell us. I'm not bigoted in his favour. I know your faults, Hugh.

He wags his head at HUGH, *who writhes with irritation.*

HUGH. Why can't you leave them alone . . leave us alone?

BEATRICE. I'd state my case against Hugh, if I thought he'd retaliate.

HUGH. [*Desperately rounding on his brother.*] If I tell you, you won't understand. You understand nothing! Beatrice is angry with me because I won't prostitute my art to make money.

BOOTH. [*Glancing at his wife.*] Please don't use metaphors of that sort.

BEATRICE. [*Reasonably.*] Yes, I think Hugh ought to earn more money.

BOOTH. [*Quite pleased to be getting along at last.*] Well, why doesn't he?

HUGH. I don't want money.

BOOTH. You can't say you don't want money any more than you can say you don't want bread.

BEATRICE. [*As she breaks off her cotton.*] It's when one has known what it is to be a little short of both . .

Now the Major spreads himself, and begins to be very wise, while HUGH, *to whom this is more intolerable than all, can only clutch his hair.*

BOOTH. You know I never considered Art a very good profession for you, Hugh. And you won't even stick to one department of it. It's a profession that gets people into very bad habits, I consider. Couldn't you take up something else? You could still do those wood-cuts in your spare time to amuse yourself.

HUGH. [*Commenting on this with two deliberate shouts of simulated mirth.*] Ha! Ha!

BOOTH. [*Sublimely superior.*] Well, it wouldn't much matter if you didn't do them at all!

BEATRICE. [*Subtly.*] Booth, there speaks the true critic.

BOOTH. [*Deprecating any title to omniscience.*] Well, I don't pretend to know much about Art, but——

HUGH. It would matter to me. There speaks the artist.

BEATRICE. The arrogance of the artist.

HUGH. We have a right to be arrogant.

BEATRICE. Good workmen are humble.

HUGH. And look to their wages.

BEATRICE. Well, I'm only a workman.

With that she breaks the contact of this quiet, deadly, hopeless little quarrel by turning her head away. The Major, who has given it most friendly attention, comments . .

BOOTH. Of course! Quite so! I'm sure all that is a very interesting difference of opinion.

MRS. VOYSEY *leaves her armchair for her favourite station at the dining table.*

MRS. VOYSEY. Booth is the only one of you that I can

hear at all distinctly. But if you two foolish young people think you want to separate . . try it. You'll soon come back to each other and be glad to. People can't fight against Nature for long. And marriage is a natural state . . once you're married.

BOOTH. [*With intense approval.*] Quite right, Mother.

MRS. VOYSEY. I know.

She resumes the Nineteenth Century. The Major, to the despair of everybody, makes yet another start, trying oratory this time.

BOOTH. My own opinion is, Beatrice and Hugh, that you don't realise the meaning of the word marriage. I don't call myself a religious man . . but dash it all, you were married in church! . . And you then entered upon an awful compact! . . Surely . . as a woman, Beatrice . . the religious point of it ought to appeal to you. Good Lord, suppose everybody were to carry on like this! And have you considered, Beatrice, that . . whether you're right or whether you're wrong . . if you desert Hugh, you cut yourself off from the Family?

BEATRICE. [*With the sweetest of smiles.*] That will distress me terribly.

BOOTH. [*Not doubting her for a moment.*] Of course.

HUGH *flings up his head and finds relief at last in many words.*

HUGH. I wish to Heaven I'd ever been able to cut myself off from the family! Look at Trenchard.

BOOTH. [*Gobbling a little at this unexpected attack.*] I do not forgive Trenchard for quarreling with and deserting our Father.

HUGH. Trenchard quarreled because that was his only way of escape.

BOOTH. Escape from what?

HUGH. From tyranny! . . from hypocrisy! . . from boredom! . . from his Happy English Home!

BEATRICE. [*Kindly.*] Hugh . . Hugh . . It's no use.

BOOTH. [*Attempting sarcasm.*] Speak so that Mother can hear you!

But HUGH *isn't to be stopped now.*

HUGH. Why are we all dull, cubbish, uneducated, hopelessly middle-class . . that is, hopelessly out of date?

BOOTH. [*Taking this as very personal.*] Cubbish!

HUGH. . . Because it's the middle-class ideal that you should respect your parents . . live with them . . think with them . . grow like them. Natural affection and gratitude! That's what's expected, isn't it?

BOOTH. [*Not to be obliterated.*] Certainly.

HUGH. Keep your children ignorant of all that you don't know, penniless except for your good pleasure, dependent on you for permission to breathe freely . . and be sure that their gratitude will be most disinterested, and affection very natural. If your father's a drunkard, or poor, then perhaps you get free, and can form an opinion or two of your own .. and can love him or hate him as he deserves. But our Father and Mother were models. They did their duty by us . . and taught us ours. Trenchard escaped, as I say. You took to the Army . . so of course you've never discovered how behind the times you are. [*The Major is stupent.*] I tried to express myself in art . . and found there was nothing to express . . I'd been so well brought up. D'you blame me if I wander about in search of a soul of some sort? And Honor——

BOOTH. [*Disputing savagely.*] Honor is very happy at home. Everyone loves her.

HUGH. [*With fierce sarcasm.*] Yes . . what do we call her? Mother's right hand! I wonder they bothered to give her a name. By the time little Ethel came they were tired of training children. . [*His voice loses its sting; he doesn't complete this sentence.*]

BEATRICE. Poor little Ethel . .

BOOTH. Poor Ethel!

They speak as one speaks of the dead, and so the wrangling stops. Then EDWARD *interposes quietly.*

EDWARD. Yes, Hugh, if we'd been poor . .

HUGH. I haven't spoken of your fate, Edward. That's too shameful.

EDWARD. . . We should at least have learnt how to spend money.

BOOTH. [*Pathetically.*] Really, Edward, need you attack me?

HUGH. Well . . you're so proud of representing the family!

BOOTH. And may I ask what we're discussing now?

BEATRICE. Yes, Edward. I knew how to get the greatest possible happiness out of a five-pound note years before I had one.

EDWARD. The first man who saved a sovereign has made a prisoner of me.

BOOTH. [*Determined to capture the conversation again.*] Has made a . . ?

EDWARD. Will make . . if you understand that better, Booth.

BOOTH. I don't understand it at all. [*They leave him the field.*] And why, for no earthly reason, we must suddenly open up a—a street, which is very painful . . I really cannot see. One never knows who may be listening. [*He glances most uneasily towards the door and drops his voice.*] In that unhappy business, Edward, you very wisely did what we all felt to be your duty. I'm sure we all hope you have succeeded in your endeavours. But the least we can do now in respect to our poor Father's memory is to bury the matter in—in decent oblivion. And please . . please don't talk of prison. I thought you'd given up that idea long ago. [*Having dismissed that subject unopposed, he takes a long breath.*] Now we will re-

turn to the original subject of discussion. Hugh, this question of a separation——

Past all patience, HUGH *jumps up and flings his chair back to its place.*

HUGH. Beatrice and I mean to separate. And nothing you may say will prevent us. The only difficulty in the way is money. Can we command enough to live apart comfortably?

BOOTH. Well?

HUGH. Well . . we can't.

BOOTH. Well?

HUGH. So we can't separate.

BOOTH. [*Speaking with bewilderment.*] Then what in Heaven's name have we been discussing it for?

HUGH. I haven't discussed it! I don't want to discuss it! Why can't you mind your own business? Now I'll go back to the billiard room and my book.

He is gone before the poor Major can recover his lost breath.

BOOTH. [*As he does recover it.*] I am not an impatient man . . but really . . [*And then words fail him.*]

BEATRICE. [*Commenting calmly.*] Of course, Hugh was a spoilt child. They grow to hate their parents sooner than others. He still cries for what he wants. That makes him a wearisome companion.

BOOTH. [*Very sulky now.*] You married him with your eyes open, I suppose?

BEATRICE. How few women marry with their eyes open!

BOOTH. You have never made the best of Hugh.

BEATRICE. I have spared him that indignity.

BOOTH. [*Vindictively.*] I am very glad that you can't separate.

BEATRICE. As soon as I'm reasonably sure of earning an income I shall walk off from him.

The Major revives.

BOOTH. You will do nothing of the sort, Beatrice.

BEATRICE. [*Unruffled.*] How will you stop me, Booth?

BOOTH. I shall tell Hugh he must command you to stay.

BEATRICE. [*With a little smile.*] Now that might make a difference. It was one of the illusions of my girlhood that I should love a man who would master me.

BOOTH. Hugh must assert himself.

He begins to walk about, giving some indication of how it should be done. BEATRICE'S *smile has vanished.*

BEATRICE. Don't think I've enjoyed taking the lead in everything throughout my married life. But someone had to plan and scheme and be foreseeing . . we weren't sparrows or lilies of the field . . someone had to get up and do something. [*She becomes conscious of his strutting, and smiles rather mischievously.*] Ah . . if I'd married you, Booth!

BOOTH'S *face grows beatific.*

BOOTH. Well, I must own to thinking that I am a masterful man . . that is the duty of every man to be so. [*He adds forgivingly.*] Poor old Hugh!

BEATRICE. [*Unable to resist temptation.*] If I'd tried to leave you, Booth, you'd have whipped me . . wouldn't you?

BOOTH. [*Ecstatically complacent.*] Ha . . well . . !

BEATRICE. Do say yes. Think how it'll frighten Emily.

The Major strokes his moustache, and is most friendly.

BOOTH. Hugh's been a worry to me all my life. And now as Head of the Family . . Well, I suppose I'd better go and give the dear old chap another talking to. I quite see your point of view, Beatrice.

BEATRICE. Why disturb him at his book?

MAJOR BOOTH *leaves them, squaring his shoulders as becomes a lord of creation. The two sisters-in-law*

go on with their work silently for a moment; then BEATRICE *adds . .*

BEATRICE. Do you find Booth difficult to manage, Emily?

EMILY. [*Putting down her knitting to consider the matter.*] No. It's best to allow him to talk himself out. When he's done that he'll often come to me for advice. I let him get his own way as much as possible . . or think he's getting it. Otherwise he becomes so depressed.

BEATRICE. [*Quietly amused.*] Edward shouldn't hear this. What has he to do with women's secrets?

EDWARD. I won't tell . . and I'm a bachelor.

EMILY. [*Solemnly, as she takes up her knitting again.*] Do you really mean to leave Hugh?

BEATRICE. [*Slightly impatient.*] Emily, I've said so.

They are joined by ALICE MAITLAND, *who comes in gaily.*

ALICE. What's Booth shouting about in the billiard room?

EMILY. [*Pained.*] On Christmas Eve, too!

BEATRICE. Don't you take any interest in my matrimonial affairs?

MRS. VOYSEY *shuts up the Nineteenth Century and removes her spectacles.*

MRS. VOYSEY. That's a very interesting article. The Chinese Empire must be in a shocking state! Is it ten o'clock yet?

EDWARD. Past.

MRS. VOYSEY. [*As* EDWARD *is behind her.*] Can anyone see the clock?

ALICE. It's past ten, Auntie.

MRS. VOYSEY. Then I think I'll go to my room.

EMILY. Shall I come and look after you, Mother?

MRS. VOYSEY. If you'd find Honor for me, Emily.

EMILY *goes in search of the harmless, necessary*

HONOR, *and* MRS. VOYSEY *begins her nightly chant of departure.*

MRS. VOYSEY. Good-night, Alice. Good-night, Edward.

EDWARD. Good-night, Mother.

MRS. VOYSEY. [*With sudden severity.*] I'm not pleased with you, Beatrice.

BEATRICE. I'm sorry, Mother.

But, without waiting to be answered, the old lady has sailed out of the room. BEATRICE, EDWARD *and* ALICE *are attuned to each other enough to be able to talk with ease.*

BEATRICE. Hugh is right about his family. It'll never make any new life for itself.

EDWARD. There are Booth's children.

BEATRICE. Poor little devils!

ALICE. [*Judicially.*] Emily is an excellent mother.

BEATRICE. Yes . . they'll grow up good men and women. And one will go into the Army and one into the Navy and one into the Church . . and perhaps one to the Devil and the Colonies. They'll serve their country, and govern it, and help to keep it like themselves . . dull and respectable . . hopelessly middle-class. [*She puts down her work now and elevates an oratorical fist.*] Genius and Poverty may exist in England, if they'll hide their heads. For show days we've our aristocracy. But never let us forget, gentlemen, that it is the plain, solid middle-class man who has made us . . what we are.

EDWARD. [*In sympathetic derision.*] Hear! hear . . ! and cries of bravo!

BEATRICE. Now that is out of my book . . the next one. [*She takes up her work again.*] You know, Edward . . without wishing to open up Painful Streets . . however scandalous it has been, your father left you a man's work to do.

EDWARD. [*His face cloudy.*] An outlaw's!

BEATRICE. [*Whimsical, after a moment.*] I meant that. At all events you've not had to be your Father's right arm . . or the instrument of justice . . or a representative of the people . . or anything second hand of that sort, have you?

EDWARD. [*With sudden excitement.*] Do you know what I discovered the other day about [*he nods at the portrait*] . . him?

BEATRICE. [*Enquiring calmly.*] Innocence or guilt?

EDWARD. He saved his firm once . . that was true. A most capable piece of heroism. Then, fifteen years afterwards . . he started again.

BEATRICE. [*Greatly interested.*] Did he, now?

EDWARD. One can't believe it was merely through weakness . .

BEATRICE. [*With artistic enthusiasm.*] Of course not. He was a great financier . . a man of imagination. He had to find scope for his abilities, or die. He despised these fat little clients living so snugly on their unearned incomes . . and put them and their money to the best use he could.

EDWARD. [*Shaking his head solemnly.*] That's all a fine phrase for robbery.

BEATRICE *turns her clever face to him and begins to follow up her subject keenly.*

BEATRICE. My dear Edward . . I understand you've been robbing your rich clients for the benefit of the poor ones?

ALICE. [*Who hasn't missed a word.*] That's true.

EDWARD. [*Gently.*] Well . . we're all a bit in debt to the poor, aren't we?

BEATRICE. Quite so. And you don't possess, and your father didn't possess that innate sense of the sacredness of property . . . [*she enjoys that phrase*] which alone can make a truly honest man. Nor did the man possess it who picked my pocket last Friday week . . nor does the tax-

gatherer . . . nor do I. Your father's freedom from prejudice was tempered by a taste for Power and Display. Yours is by Charity. But that's all the difference I'll admit between you. Robbery! . . it's a beautiful word.

EDWARD. [*A little pained by as much of this as he takes to be serious.*] I think he might have told me the truth.

BEATRICE. Perhaps he didn't know it! Would you have believed him?

EDWARD. Perhaps not. But I loved him.

BEATRICE *looks again at the gentle, earnest face.*

BEATRICE. After as well as before?

EDWARD. Yes. And not from mere force of habit, either.

BEATRICE. [*With reverence in her voice now.*] That should silence a bench of judges. Well . . well . .

Her sewing finished, she stuffs the things into her basket, gets up, in her abrupt, unconventional way, and goes without another word. Her brain is busy with the Voysey Inheritance. EDWARD *and* ALICE *are left in chairs by the fire, facing each other like an old domestic couple.*

EDWARD. Stay and speak to me.

ALICE. I want to. Something more serious has happened since dinner.

EDWARD. I'm glad you can see that.

ALICE. What is it?

EDWARD. [*With sudden exultation.*] The smash has come . . and not by my fault. Old George Booth——

ALICE. Has he been here?

EDWARD. Can you imagine it? That old man forced me into telling him the truth. I told him to take what money of his there was, and prosecute. He won't prosecute, but he bargains to take the money . . and further to bleed us, sovereign by sovereign, as I earn sovereign by sovereign with the sweat of my soul. I'll see him in his Christian Heaven first . . the Jew!

ALICE. [*Keeping her head.*] You can't reason with him?

EDWARD. He thinks he has the whip hand, and he means to use it. Also the Vicar has been told . . who has told his wife. She knows how not to keep a secret. The smash has come at last.

ALICE. So you're glad?

EDWARD. Thankful. My conscience is clear. I've done my best. [*Then, as usual with him, his fervour collapses.*] And oh, Alice . . has it been worth doing?

ALICE. [*Encouragingly.*] Half a dozen people pulled out of the fire.

EDWARD. If only that isn't found out! I've bungled this job, Alice. I feared all along I should. It was work for a strong man . . not for me.

ALICE. Work for a patient man.

EDWARD. You use kind words. But I've never shirked the truth about myself. My father said mine was a weak nature. He knew.

ALICE. You have a religious nature.

EDWARD. [*Surprised.*] Oh, no!

ALICE. [*Proceeding to explain.*] Therefore you're not fond of creeds and ceremonies. Therefore . . as the good things of this worldly world don't satisfy you, you shirk contact with it all you can. I understand this temptation to neglect and despise practical things. But if one yields to it one's character narrows and cheapens. That's a pity . . but it's so.

EDWARD. [*His eyes far away.*] D'you ever feel that there aren't enough windows in a house?

ALICE. [*Prosaically.*] In this weather . . too many.

EDWARD. Well, then . . in a house—especially in a big city—in my office, at work, then . . one is out of hearing of all the music of the world. And when one does get back to Nature, instead of being all curves to her roundness, one is all corners.

ALICE. [*Smiling at him.*] Yes, you love to think idly . . just as Hugh does. You do it quite well, too. [*Then briskly.*] Edward, may I scold you?

EDWARD. For that?

ALICE. Because of that. You're grown to be a sloven lately . . deliberately letting yourself be unhappy.

EDWARD. Is happiness under one's control?

ALICE. My friend, you shouldn't neglect your happiness any more than you neglect to wash your face. Here has the squalour of your work been making you poor. Because it was liable to be stopped at any moment, uncompleted . . why should that let your life be incomplete? Edward, for the last eighteen months you've been more like a moral portent than a man. You've not had a smile to throw to a friend . . or an opinion upon any subject. You've dropped your volunteering. [*He protests.*] I know there's something comic in volunteering . . though Heaven knows what it is! I suppose you found it out of keeping with your unhappy fate. And how slack you were in your politics last November. I don't believe you even voted . .

EDWARD. [*Contrite at this.*] That was wrong of me!

ALICE. Yes, I expect a man to be a good citizen. And you don't even eat properly.

With that she completes the accusation, and EDWARD *searches round for a defence.*

EDWARD. Alice, it was always an effort with me to do all those things . . and lately every effort has had to go to my work.

ALICE. You did them . . on principle.

EDWARD. Don't laugh at me.

ALICE. [*Whispering the awful words.*] Then truthfully, Edward, once upon a time you were a bit of a prig.

EDWARD. [*With enough sense of humour to whisper back.*] Was I?

ALICE. I'm afraid so. But the prig fell ill when your

father died . . and had to be buried in his grave. [*Then her voice rises stirringly.*] Oh, don't you see what a blessing this cursed work was meant to be to you? Why must you stand stiff against it?

EDWARD. [*Without a smile now.*] But lately, Alice, I've hardly known myself. Once or twice I've lost my temper . . I've been brutal.

ALICE. That's the best news in the world. There's your own wicked nature coming out. That's what we've been waiting for .. that's what we want. That's you.

EDWARD. [*Still serious.*] I'm sorry for it.

ALICE. Oh, Edward, be a little proud of poor humanity . . take your own share in it gladly. It so discourages the rest of us if you don't.

Suddenly he breaks down completely.

EDWARD. I can't let myself be glad and live. There's the future to think of. And I'm so afraid of that. I must pretend I don't care . . even to myself . . even to you.

ALICE. [*Her mocking at an end.*] What is it you fear most about the future . . not just the obviously unpleasant things?

EDWARD. They'll put me in prison.

ALICE. Perhaps.

EDWARD. Who'll be the man who comes out?

ALICE. Yourself.

EDWARD. No, no! I'm a coward. I can't stand alone, it's too lonely. I need affection . . I need friends. I cling to people that I don't care for deeply . . just for the comfort of it. I've no home of my own. Every house that welcomes me now I like to think of as something of a home. And I know that this disgrace in store will leave me for a long time or a short time . . homeless.

There he sits, shaken. ALICE *waits a moment, not taking her eyes from him; then speaks.*

ALICE. There's something else I want to scold you for.

You've still given up proposing to me. Certainly that shows a lack of courage . . and of perseverance. Or is it the loss of what I always considered a very laudable ambition?

EDWARD *is hardly able to trust his ears. Then he looks into her face, and his thankfulness frames itself into a single sentence.*

EDWARD. Will you marry me?

ALICE. Yes, Edward.

For a minute he just holds his breath with happiness. But he shakes himself free of it, almost savagely.

EDWARD. No! no! no! We mustn't be stupid. I'm sorry I asked for that.

ALICE. [*With serene strength.*] I'm glad that you want me. While I live . . where I am will be Home.

EDWARD. [*Struggling with himself.*] No, it's too late. If you'd said Yes before I came into my inheritance . . perhaps I shouldn't have given myself to the work. So be glad that it's too late. I am.

ALICE. [*Happily.*] There was never any chance of my marrying you when you were only a well-principled prig. I didn't want you . . and I don't believe you really wanted me. Now you do. And you must always take what you want.

EDWARD. [*Turning to her again.*] My dear, what have we to start life upon . . to build our house upon? Poverty . . and prison for me.

ALICE. [*Mischievous.*] Edward, you seem to think that all the money in the world was invested in your precious firm. I have four hundred a year of my own. At least let that tempt you.

EDWARD *catches her in his arms with a momentary little burst of passion.*

EDWARD. You're tempting me.

She did not resist, but nevertheless he breaks away from her, disappointed with himself. She goes on, quietly, serenely.

ALICE. Am I? Am I playing upon your senses in any way? Am I a silly child, looking to you for protection in return for your favour? Shall I hinder or help your life? If you don't think me your equal as woman to man, we'll never speak of this again. But if you do . . look at me, and make your choice. To refuse me my work and happiness in life and to cripple your own nature . . or to take my hand.

She puts out her hand frankly, as a friend should. With only a second's thought he, happy, too, now, takes it as frankly. Then she sits beside him, and quite cheerfully changes the subject.

ALICE. Now, referring to the subject of Mr. George Booth. What will he do?

EDWARD. [*Responsive though impatient.*] He'll do nothing. I shall be before him.

ALICE. What about his proposal?

EDWARD. That needs no answer.

ALICE. Yes, it does. I know the temptation to hit back at him mock-heroically . . it's natural. Well, we'll consider it done. But he's a silly old man, and he doesn't know what he's talking about. I think we can bargain with him to keep the firm going somehow . . and if we can we must.

At this EDWARD *makes a last attempt to abandon himself to his troubles.*

EDWARD. No, Alice, no . . let it end here. It has done for me . . I'm broken. And of course we can't be married . . that's absurd.

ALICE. [*With firmness enough for two.*] We shall be married. And nothing's broken . . except our pride and righteousness . . and several other things we're better

without. And now we must break our dignity in to bargaining.

EDWARD. [*Struggling in the toils of virtue.*] But it'll be so useless. Colpus'll be round in a day or two to make his conditions . . he'll tell some intimate friend. They'll all come after their money like wasps after honey. And if they know I won't lift a finger in my own defence . . what sort of mercy will they have?

ALICE. [*Triumphantly completing her case.*] No, Edward, if you surrender yourself entirely, you'll find them powerless against you. You see, you had something to hope or fear from Mr. Booth . . you hoped in your heart he'd end your trouble. But when you've conquered that last little atom of the selfishness which gets in one's way, I think you'll find you can do what you wish with these selfish men. [*And she adds, fervently.*] Oh, it's a power so seldom used. But the man who is able, and cares deeply, and yet has nothing to hope or fear is all powerful . . even in little things.

EDWARD. Will nothing ever happen to set me free? Shall I never be able to rest for a moment . . turn round and say I've succeeded or I've failed?

ALICE. That isn't what matters.

EDWARD. If they could all meet, and agree, they might syndicate themselves, and keep me at it for life.

ALICE. What more could you wish for?

EDWARD. Than that dreary round!

ALICE. My dear, the world must be put tidy. That's the work which splendid criminals . . and others leave about for us poor commonplace people to do.

EDWARD. [*With a little laugh.*] And I don't believe in Heaven, either.

ALICE. [*Close to him.*] But there's to be our life. What's wrong with that?

EDWARD. My dear, when they put me in prison for swindling—— [*He makes the word sound its worst.*]

ALICE. I think they won't. But if they are so stupid . . I must be very careful.

EDWARD. Of what?

ALICE. To avoid false pride. I shall be foolishly proud of you.

EDWARD. It's good to be praised sometimes . . by you.

ALICE. My heart praises you. Good-night.

EDWARD. Good-night.

She kisses his forehead. But he puts up his face like a child, so she bends down, and for the first time their lips meet. Then she steps back from him, adding happily, with perhaps just a touch of shyness.

ALICE. Till to-morrow.

EDWARD. [*Echoing in gratitude the hope and promise in her voice.*] Till to-morrow.

She leaves him to sit there by the table for a few moments longer, looking into his future, streaked as it is to be with trouble and joy. As whose is not? From above . . from above the mantelpiece, that is to say . . the face of the late MR. VOYSEY *seems to look down upon his son not unkindly, though with that curious buccaneering twist of the eyebrows which distinguished his countenance in life.*

"The Voysey Inheritance" was first played at the Court Theatre, a Vedrenne-Barker performance, on the afternoon of November 7th, 1905.

Mr. Voysey	*A. E. George*
Mrs. Voysey	*Miss Florence Haydon*
Trenchard Voysey, K.C.	*Eugene Mayeur*
Honor Voysey	*Miss Geraldine Olliffe*
Major Booth Voysey	*Charles Fulton*
Mrs. Booth Voysey	*Miss Grace Edwin*
Christopher	*Harry C. Duff*
Edward Voysey	*Thalberg Corbett*
Hugh Voysey	*Dennis Eadie*
Mrs. Hugh Voysey	*Miss Henrietta Watson*
Ethel Voysey	*Miss Alexandra Carlisle*
Denis Tregoning	*Frederick Lloyd*
Alice Maitland	*Miss Mabel Hackney*
Mr. Booth	*O. B. Clarence*
The Rev. Evan Colpus	*Edmund Gwenn*
Peacey	*Trevor Lowe*
Phœbe	*Miss Gwynneth Galton*
Mary	*Mrs. Fordyce*

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